

I Can't Take This (All This Meaningless)

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I Can't Take This (All This Meaningless)

by [Cbyrno521](#)

Summary

“Why are you making such a big deal over this?!” Peter all but growls, wishing he hadn't agreed to be trapped in such a small space with Tony.

“Because kid, I made a promise! So it would be in your best interest to listen to what I have to say.”

“You mean your best interest.”

Tony slams on the breaks, startling Peter. Cars honk behind him, but their complaints go unnoticed as he swerves to the side of the road, turning his head and shouting “What has gotten into you Peter?!”

“What do you care?” Peter asks, Anger simmering and on the verge of exploding.

“I care a lot. Now ‘fess up kiddo, or do I have to call May?”

The car gets quiet, the low rumble of the vehicle mixing with the labored breaths of its

occupants. Tony is glaring at Peter, who reaches for the door handle.

“Go right ahead, won’t help anyway. Calling a dead person won't magically get them to answer.”

Notes

You must enjoy seeing Peter suffer, if you clicked this story.

Regardless, welcome!! This fic is basically every bad thing that could happen to Peter, happening. Buuuuut also the solution to all the bad things. Aka, Irondad and Spiderson.

Only the first four chapters are written, so :.,))))

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

To Hope is To Expect

It had happened suddenly.

Logically, Peter knew that. He knew that the bullet that pushed too hard on her skin and ruptured into her heart was a fast one. She didn't suffer, at least for long.

But logic wasn't on his side as he stood a few feet away, paralyzed.

His spidey sense had gone haywire the moment he spotted her and the gun in the same vicinity. The malice behind the robber's eyes. And he was just *standing* in his red and blue suit, showing all that the amazing, powerful Spiderman was afraid. He. Was. Afraid.

His suit had been a blanket of safety, of warmth. It protected him, his identity. But in these moments, he hated it the most. Hated how confined he suddenly felt as he didn't move quick enough, couldn't calculate the fastest (and more importantly, easiest) way to stop the bullet that ripped out of the gun.

It's rather ironic. How she died. The situation caused for some Deja vu, but of course, that wasn't the feeling that coursed through his veins.

Icy, cold, unadulterated fear clogged his veins, morphing into a deep pit that made itself home in Peter's stomach. His legs didn't work (why didn't they work?) and he just stood there, eyes widening and mouth opening to form something, anything, that may serve as a distraction. But of course, that didn't happen either. Peter's hands could've been shaking. He didn't know. Because all he could see was her. From the moment she jerked to the left, to the moment her head bounced off of the floor.

He wasn't fast enough.

He wasn't smart enough.

He wasn't enough.

He couldn't save May.

It had been in the news.

Armed robbery gone wrong, seven injured and one killed. Under, applause to Spiderman for saving the individuals.

But he didn't save all of them.

The apartment was cold.

It was in the first few moments of opening the door to their- his apartment, did he realize that May was the warmth.

The kitchen where she danced around and sang horribly off key while trying to make Peter pancakes right before he went to school was now just a desolate area with a few fruits that had been sitting out for too long. The living room where she cuddled with her blanket on the couch and gushed about the newest drama was now coated in a resounding silence, feeling bluer than ever.

Peter didn't even make it to the other rooms before having his knees buckle under him, bringing him closer to the ground. Tears clouded his vision, hallucinations of Aunt May rushing in and helping him up spurring his emotional distress.

That night, Peter didn't patrol as Spiderman. He didn't get up from the ground, didn't bother to eat despite his fast metabolism begging for some nutrients. A part of him whispered in his ear that it wouldn't have mattered, he would've thrown it up anyways.

A small voice in the back of Peter's mind urges that Auntie May was only working overtime and

she forgot to tell him, again. That everything was fine and she'll be in the kitchen tomorrow morning making breakfast, just like usual. She would walk by and lightly kick his side to wake him up, tell him that she burnt the food again, and then suggest getting toast or a churro from the food stand across the block.

Peter hated himself for listening.

To Be A Person is To Feel

Chapter Summary

Swinging around New York has become a routine for Peter. He knows which buildings to hit, how far he can drop.

He doesn't have to think about it.

And with this free time, Peter has time to think about a few things, like his Aunt May and the social workers who were pounding at his door.

Chapter Notes

Oh my god?? The response the first chapter got was honestly way more than I anticipated?? You guys are so nice??

Thank you for all the comments, bookmarks, and kudos. There were times where I was smiling so hard I thought I was gonna break my face. You guys are the best.

Here's chapter two, I hope you enjoy!!

(tags are being updated as the story goes, so viola! there's more!)

No matter how many nights Peter spent crying and avoiding any life responsibilities, he knew that eventually he would have to get up and try to piece together small parts of his every day patterns. Things as simple as going to school.

It took longer than he would've liked to get out of bed-- even if he hadn't slept for the night, the memory of May falling to the ground in a splatter of blood too prominent in his mind -- get to the shower to rinse away grime and the weariness that seemed to have seeped into his bones, and finally get out of the door. Breakfast was forgotten; yet another meal that had been passed ever since that day.

Peter's fingers barely touched the door when his spidey sense sent electricity running up his spine, forcing him to pay attention to the footsteps outside. Without thinking about it he pursed his lips, noticing the crescendo in steps. Closer to his front door. Two muffled voices reverberated through the doorway, probably quiet enough so that the average person wouldn't be able to hear.

"This is the right address?" A voice started, questioning the second pair of feet that followed. A shuffle and the smell of rose perfume, subtle enough that it only became noticeable with enough

motion. Her voice was light and airy despite the harsh tone. Someone used to talking to kids or scared adults. Peter thought she may be one of May's old friends, but doubt kept him from confirming anything. He would've recognized her.

The two stopped walking a few feet in front of his door. Thinking quickly, Peter crouched down and sprung on the ceiling. If he needed to make a quick escape, he could crawl through the door. Nobody looks up so he'd be safe. Either that, or he could move to his room where his unlocked window was.

"Paper says so. How do you want to go about this?" The second voice answered in a gruff voice. A strong business tone. Sharp, like the tongue of a snake that demanded attention. Peter felt his arm hairs raising in alarm. The man ran a hand through his hair and the smell of grease made the teen wrinkle his nose.

"Same way we always do. Console the kid, take them upstate where he'll be put into the system for foster care. Hopefully he'll fin--"

Peter didn't stay to hear the rest, warnings from his senses proving to be correct once more. By the time they knocked on his door, he'd already changed into his Spider-man suit and fled out the window, thoughts going a mile a minute.

Flying through the city always had a therapeutic vibe. It was something only Peter could do, and he could do it for hours and hours. Being able to test the boundaries of fate by launching himself into the air and dropping until his nose barely hit the pavement, then to do it all over again? It was exhilarating, and nothing-- not even when Tony came to him with new suit upgrades and called him underoos in front of the Avengers-- could compare to the sensation.

The pull of his web when it attached to a surface was a welcomed burn. The adrenaline of peering down and seeing people looking like ants was addicting. The crowds, the sky, the gritty New York air. Everything was worth remembering, worth thinking about at a later date.

Yet today was different. He wasn't focused on the sights or even the location of where his webs landed. He was letting his muscles lead him away, freestyling his tricks and keeping them to a minimum. Simple turns, languid flips. His mind was elsewhere, thinking of other things.

Between dodging buildings and the occasional pigeon as well as tuning in more to his already sensitive hearing, web slinging had proved to be a really mind-numbing activity. Press a button, shoot a line, and just *fly*. He'd done it so much so that there was no longer that fear, that anxiety, that threatened to choke him before every fall. The 'what if's' of him landing on the ground were no longer there.

Plus, Peter knew that even though it may hurt like a bitch, there would be no permanent damage thanks to his insane healing factor.

Despite his best attempts, he found his mind wandering to Aunt May. What would her last words be if she knew her demise was that night? Did she even feel anything? Was she watching over him now, and if so, what did she think about him being Spider-man? Would she approve?

Peter took a left and clipped his shoulder on the building side.

The small jolt was enough to bring him back into the real world, cursing when realizing he had ten minutes to get to school. At the rate he was going he would be there in twelve-- excluding the time it took for him to stop and change out of his suit.

"Peter?" Karen asked, apparently keeping quiet until now. A part of him felt bad for not realizing that the ride had been filled with silence where she would usually retell whatever she found from police scanners, but at the same time he couldn't find it in him to care. "What are you doing in your suit? You should be in school. I'll have to alert Mr. Stark that you're in violation of Protocol Spidey Edu--"

He cut off her sentence with a flip and a spew of the word 'no,' shooting two webs to propel himself forward. "There's really no need Karen. I promise I'm not on patrol! I was..." Peter hesitated, wondering if he could tell Karen the real reason why he wasn't able to go out his front door today. The fear of her relaying the message to Mr. Stark and have him involved in his problems was too great, so he decided to cover the truth with a feeble lie. "I missed the train! Yeah, and I figured that this way would be faster and more efficient than just running, y'know?"

Karen was silent; either pulling up the train log for the day or contemplating his answer. After what felt like an eternity, she announced, "Alright, Peter. There is nothing against you using the suit as a way to travel to and from school, so I suppose there's no need to report."

Peter sighed with relief as he launched over a building, waving to the residents. But his momentary

comfort was short-lived as Karen said, “But there is something of concern. Your vitals seem to be raised, and you’re... Uncharacteristically quiet, to put it in good terms. May I ask what’s the matter? Would that help?”

It was in this moment that Peter would discern his AI from any other human being. Of course he knew that she would just be a voice inside of a mask, handcrafted by Tony Stark to keep him safe where the older hero could not, but he adored her despite it. Still, his admiration could not cover the fact that she wasn't real. She had tried her hardest to seem less like a stiff AI by adapting to everyone's speech patterns; to build a reassurance to him that she was there to listen and offer advice wherever she could.

“No, what?” His voice raised an octave with the question, sending an internal wince through his veins. *Damn it*, he chastised. Maybe he could hack into the suit later and turn off whatever required her to ask such questions. Hopefully Mr. Stark wouldn't mind. “Everything is fine, Karen! I'm just stressed! School starts soon and I haven't even taken off my suit!”

If Karen could tell he wasn't telling her the complete truth, she didn't mention it once more. The silence was welcoming, allowing the teenager to think.

Peter flew over a building, landing on the edge to propel himself even further. Below, he could hear a little girl gasp and shout, ‘Hey! It's Spider-man!’

The hero praise brought a smile to his face for what felt like the first time in days. Vaguely, he was reminded of the first time he saw Iron Man whizzing above him, a comet in the sky with the whine that's long since become familiar to his ears.

As if on cue, Peter realizes that Karen gives Mr. Stark updates on his health, including when his vitals raise to a certain degree. If Karen alerted him, then Peter would probably be expecting a call from the man himself asking why he's in the suit this early. What a great first message after weeks of radio silence.

“Uh, Karen?” he started tentatively. Of course, it was only a couple of seconds before Peter got the usual, “Yes, Peter?” in her robotic mother voice. The sound brought a slight comfort to him, shoulders involuntarily relaxing in the tiniest bit as they flexed to catch a web.

“I know you said you didn't contact Mr. Stark about me being in my suit, but you didn't tell him about my vitals, right?”

Registering the ever quiet panic in his voice, Karen was quick to comfort him. “I find no reason to. After all, it’s only stress from being late, correct?”

Her tone was playful and sarcastic, exactly what Peter needed. It tugged at the strings in his heart, reminding him of when May used to take that same tone with him after he criticized her cooking. A chuckle erupted from his mouth, a small “Yeah,” slipping through.

The rest of the swing was relatively peaceful, and he was able to land on a roof a street away from the school to change out of his costume.

As Peter folded it into his backpack and started his way downstairs, he wondered how long it would take for the adrenaline of swinging would wear off and reality would set back in.

The Delicate Chaos

Chapter Summary

Maybe he deserves this. All of this sadness.

His friends left. His Aunt May left.

And now, he can't even go to school.

Peter Parker is officially on the run.

Chapter Notes

Me? With the semblance of an update schedule? LMAOO not for long!

Tags are updated, along with the amount of chapter's there'll be.

As always, tell me what you think in the comments!

It was only when Peter was walking down the crowded hallway of Midtown high did it finally come to him that he was completely and utterly alone.

While a lot of the time his super hearing and sight was a blessing, this was one of the moments he would gladly classify it as a curse. Peter could hear every conversation, could focus on each word being uttered out of a specific person's mouth if he wanted. And although this wouldn't normally affect him, it just served to show that nobody was around that wanted to talk to him. His eyesight didn't let him forget that, either. Instantly he could pick out each of the cliques that littered the hallways, blocking the pathway for many.

While Ned would often come and accompany him on the walk to his locker talking animatedly about the newest Lego set that they could work on, Peter knew that it wasn't going to happen. Just as the possibility of MJ coming up behind him reading her book and pointedly ignoring anything the two would talk about wouldn't happen.

A fresh wave of grief splashed over his body, a memory of being dumped into a lake flashing through the hero's mind. The coldness that enveloped his body, seemingly attaching itself to his very bones. A dark reminder of words left unsaid, promises given to his two old friends that he knew he couldn't keep.

Reaching his locker and inputting the combination seemed meaningless. Peter knew that he needed to grab his books, but it wasn't as if he would be able to pay attention in his classes anyways.

Whatever shitty deity that was looking out for him was probably done giving Peter a hell of a time if the lack of torment from Flash served as anything. In fact, all throughout his classes he didn't spy the bully. Although it should've bothered him, he couldn't bring himself to care. He felt drained, weighed down by all of his heavy emotions to the point of numbness.

Nothing felt right anymore.

It wasn't until they were all switching to their fourth period did something jarr Peter out of his reverie. His spidey-sense sent electric chills down his back, causing him to tense up and nearly run into the person in front of him. His eyes became glazed and distant as he scanned the hallways, looking for the potential threat. His back was rigid like a coil, ready to pounce on whatever threat was around.

The crackling of speakers, students stopping to hear the announcement.

"Peter Parker, come to the front office. I repeat, Peter Parker to the front office."

Peter felt his brows furrow as his head tilted down, trying to make a mental note of everything that happened in class. There wasn't anything that stuck out particularly-- at least for the parts that he could remember. But then he thought further back, and the pieces fell together in a matter of two seconds. The social workers. Of course they would try to track him down when they missed him at his home.

And in those two seconds, reality seemed to truly dawn on Peter. He couldn't go to school anymore, he couldn't show his face anywhere, he couldn't even go home because he was being tracked. He was now a runaway, left to his own devices at the ripe age of seventeen.

The bell rang, and Peter realized he was still standing in the now barren hallway. His heart skipped a beat as he started jogging to the back entrance of the school, stealthily avoiding classrooms and anywhere that may have gotten him caught and sent to the office.

Luckily for him, he's snuck out of Midtown many times before. The routes were practically muscle memory formed after months of needing to make a hasty escape to save whatever part of New York that was endangered that afternoon. His hands itching to feel his mask in his backpack,

knowing that the time would soon come.

Quiet as a spider, Peter opened the door leading to the outdoors. Just on the other side of the fence a few hundred feet ahead, two heartbeats could be heard along with the low hum of a car engine. “Shit,” Peter mumbled, realizing that they were probably anticipating his panic and had people at each door. However, a small smirk spreads across his face. “They may be expecting Peter Parker, but they sure aren’t expecting Spiderman.”

Checking for prying eyes and finding it safe, Peter began to climb the top of the school. His fingerprints stung with the jutting of small rocks that thistle from the building, but it was nothing compared to the racing adrenaline that coursed through his veins. If he remembered correctly, there was an extra backpack up on the roof filled with web canisters and supplies needed for a makeshift shooter in the case that his ever broke on school grounds. Thanking his past self, Peter quickly changed out of his regular clothes, pulling on the suit and switching his webs out just in case.

With practiced ease Spider-Man took off the building, doing a backflip right before shooting a web out, sending him soaring through the sky and closer to home. The shocked expressions of the social workers were a real kicker, but it only served as a reminder of why he was running away.

Almost belatedly he realized that Karen would be asking about him. And as if on cue, her motherly robotic voice filled his ears. “Hi Peter, it’s currently ten forty-nine, with sunny skies and a temperature of eighty four. There’s currently no crime being reported, but I’ll still have to send a message to Mr. Stark about your leave from school.”

The Spiderling flew through the sky, letting out a loud curse at his AI. He knew that there wasn’t enough power in the world to convince his companion not to rat him out so instead he focused on webbing his way back to his home. ‘Apartment?’ Peter idly wondered. The small place couldn’t be his home anymore, but was it too early to switch tenses?

“Karen,” Peter breathily started, watching the pavement as it got closer and closer right before shooting another web from his right shooter, “Are there any possible web combinations that last for roughly eight hours and can withstand holding a lot of objects?”

the AI’s soft voice rang through his ears seconds later. “Yes, there are exactly four combinations that fit what you’ve described. Would you like me to switch to the most durable, or the most long-lasting?”

“Most durable, and switch when I say please,” Peter asks, mind flooding with the possibility that

he wouldn't even be able to enter his house to grab his belongings with social workers scouring for him. "How long would that one last, exactly?"

"Six hours and forty-five minutes."

"Good enough," He answers, right before firing another web to bring him to the sky.

Before I Choose to Stay

Chapter Summary

Peter swings back home and realizes how hard it will be to leave behind his life.

Enter the man with the murmur.

Chapter Notes

y'all lemme just tell you

next chapter is a doozy.

Also sorry that this is late, I wanted to at least get the next chapter half way written before I published this one :). Already, it's the longest chapter i've written for this fic and it has the most action i've ever written. It's gonna be exciting!!

And one more thing, thank you to everyone commenting, leaving kudos, and bookmarking!! It makes me happy to see people getting excited over my writing and ideas :,)))) <3

Peter's room was how he left it this morning.

He wasn't sure what he was expecting, in all honesty. Even if the social workers got in the apartment, it wouldn't make sense for them to trash his room looking for him.

However, he couldn't help but feel unsettled. Because this was the last time he would see his bedroom like this. The walls coated in his favorite shade of grey, science pun shirts thrown around haphazardly. Peter would never get to fix his bed again, or even hear Aunt May complain about the state of his closet.

Clad in his spider suit, Peter tried not to think about how this may be the last time he lives anywhere with a bedroom.

Moving quickly, he deployed the spider web Karen suggested, numbly grabbing as much of his personal belongings as possible. Sounds from the hallways had him walking nimbly on his feet, not wanting to alert any other occupants of the late visits in fear that the social workers tipped them to keep an eye on a certain brown haired teenager.

“Think, think..” Peter murmured to himself, throwing a few pairs of shirts in the web. Once he had enough clothes to last a while, along with a few of his belongings that he couldn’t part without, Spidey quietly opened the door to the rest of the apartment.

The cold feeling of nostalgia washed over him once more when he viewed the small place. Ghosts of memories all danced together in front of his eyes, showing scenes only for him to see.

As he swiped pictures off the walls, he was reminded of how Ben and May playfully fought over the order, before Peter (in all of his child glory) suggested they go from youngest to oldest, so that when they enter the hallways they would be met with old smiles, and towards the end be shown more recent happiness. Something for them to cling on as they departed for their bedrooms at the end of a night, almost like the pictures would be the last thing on their minds as they laid down.

The memory brought a smile to his face as he gently touched the nearest photo, reveling in Aunt May’s happy smile. Deciding that it would do no harm, Peter took the picture off the wall for keepsakes and continued to the living room.

Grabbing old notes and important papers, Peter reminisced on how when Ben passed, the remaining Parkers seemed to grow in a vegetative state. Leaving rooms after nights of no sleep, only to sit on the couch next to each other. No speaking, no eating. No nothing, except the sick comfort they found in each other’s presence, with the knowledge that *at least they had each other*.

May was the one to break free of the cycle first. Her glazed, clouded eyes, seemed to grow a little brighter. Not by much, but enough for her to become aware of how malnourished they both were. Knowing after days of silence that Peter wouldn’t be up for conversation, she grabbed a sticky note and pen, writing “Italian for dinner?”

And that’s how they communicated after Ben’s death. Neither accepting it, but not really pushing it under the rug.

Peter snapped back from the memory, holding the old sticky note in his hand. Cursing at himself for wasting time, he stuffed it in the folder he didn’t remember accumulating before moving to the next section of the house; the kitchen.

It seemed there that Peter really had the most time deciding on what to bring. It would be smart to grab as much food as possible, but that also meant that there would be less space in his bag for more important items. On the thought of food, Peter felt his treacherous stomach rumble, a painful reminder that the last time that he ate was when May was alive several days ago. Making a split second decision Peter grabbed as much as he could hold, stuffing it in his mouth and chewing quickly. If he could leave on a full stomach then he would be set for a while before his enhanced metabolism starts slowing down his other abilities.

Footsteps outside the front door had Peter stopping like a deer in headlights, eyes widening comically. As quietly as possible he swallowed his food and tried not to choke when it felt like it got stuck in his throat. The heartbeat that pounded in his ears wasn't his own, and he was vaguely curious as to how there seemed to be a murmur in the beating.

Peter stuffed the rest of his food in the corner of his arms, silently making his way to the wall to walk on the ceiling. There was no chance of padded footprints for the person to hone on if he did so, protecting his location when needed.

Successfully at the other side of the apartment, Spidey dropped into his room. The heartbeat was still there, but they weren't talking. No indications of leaving. Peter lowered all of his loot into the giant web sack, satisfied with the result.

However, there was still one room that needed to be combed through.

Dreadfully, Peter reached out and stuck his hands to the ceiling, hoisting the rest of his body up. There wasn't enough time in the world to prepare him for walking in her room, *the* room, but the pestering voice in the back of his head whispered that there wasn't enough time for anything. Not with the person with the heart murmur still standing at the door.

Reaching down, Peter sighed and braced himself as he made contact with the door handle and pushed. Almost at the same time as the small burst of air that hit the top of his head from the door opening, Peter's enhanced senses latched onto everything. The overwhelming hit of May's favorite perfume seemed to clog his nose, almost unscented by anyone else. The sound of silence that reverberated throughout her room, a stark contrast to the usual (although, Peter sickly thought, not anymore) television kept on a low hum in the corner of the room, a way to keep it lively even with her gone. The small bits of dust particles that flew around highlighted in the pathway left by the light streaming through the half-closed blinds. The feeling of emptiness, all comforting and happy feelings vanishing long ago. The taste of a happier time, one where Ben and May would be sitting on the corner of the bed, laughing and applauding Peter as he hosted a fashion show wearing May's bright red heels and Ben's long suit jacket, masterfully turning and tripping on the long sleeves.

Swallowing everything down, Peter crawled across the ceiling and dropped down on the bed, fighting the tears that threatened to spill. *No*, he chastised himself. *I will not break down when there are more important things to do.*

His snuffle was as loud as the silent promise made behind the closed doors, as Peter gathered up whatever bearings he still had and slid off the bed with practiced ease. Making the small trek

across the room, he opened up May's old closet doors and rifled through a few of her shirts, before finally pulling out Uncle Ben's old hoodie. The fabric was old and worn, years locked away causing the natural dark grey to fade to a lighter shade. Almost instinctively, Peter pulled the fabric up to his nose, inhaling deeply.

If he tried hard enough, he could trick himself into believing that Ben's cologne still lingered in the stitches.

A sudden thump had Peter reeling, quickly honing in on the sound to only find that it was from his neighbors cursing as their cat dropped their computer from off of their recliner. Ever grateful for the distraction that pulled Peter away from his dark thoughts, he pulled the worn out hoodie over his spidey suit, appreciating the fact that the sleeves covered his gloved hands. Hastily he grabbed a few more articles of their clothing (he avoided anything too bright; it could draw unwanted attention) along with his parent's wedding rings, and quickly jumped back on the ceiling to deposit his loot into the web.

Almost as a last-second thought, Peter made his way to the hidden compartment in the hallway, lifting up the old wooden floorboards to reveal their hidden stash of emergency money. Belatedly he realized how loud that had to have been, noticing how the heartbeat outside quickened very slightly.

Shit.

Peter rushed to grab the wads of cash and all but ran to his room, hearing the front door jiggle. His Spidey Senses were screaming at him, telling him to *MOVE*, and never one for theatrics, Peter did just that.

Wrapping his fingers around the webbing and hauling it on his back, Peter climbed out the window sparing only a glance at his old house. His old *home*.

The door gave in and the intruder was loose, but Peter was already webbing away.

He's Tired of Hurting, But It's All He Could Do

Chapter Summary

Peter learns exactly how weak he is when he takes on a gang that's above his skill level.

Enter in drugs, malnourishment and guns, and he's in for a bad time.

Chapter Notes

who cares about timelines? Not I. Fuck timelines. I'm God here.

Also huge shoutout to CassG for getting me motivated to write this :,) <3

Peter, around the third week, stopped counting how long it's been since he abandoned Peter Parker and settled on Homeless Spider Man.

Life, it seemed, *really* didn't favor the remaining member of the Parker family. It took him a week and countless web sacks before he finally found an abandoned warehouse. After a few hours of panicking and heaving from dirty flashbacks of dust and dirt coating his body, breathing labored as the weight of an entire building rested on his shoulders- *crying and begging for someone to come help only to have the sickening realization he's alone*- did he finally work up the courage to step in.

Only desperation kept him from searching Queens for another place to lay low.

With his full-time vigilante status, Peter has been able to clock in more hours than ever. He's saved countless amounts of people that he wouldn't have been able to before, seen more smiles during school hours that may not have had the chance if Peter wasn't there. Seeing victims walk away relatively unharmed, hearing their praises for him, it filled the void in his life that he never really realized was there, or how it formed.

So every day and every night, Peter leaves his makeshift home in the warehouse, slips out of the name Peter Parker, and becomes something more. A symbol for hope. Hope that he wants, and the world needs. What New York needs.

Peter Parker gets left behind, and Spiderman grows in the loss.

After seven weeks and four days, homelessness really settles into the seventeen-year-old. Homelessness, paired with the nonstop vigilante business.

Peter stumbled onto the side of the abandoned warehouse, dizzy with vertigo. His world was tilted, skewed, but salvation was on the other side of the tinted window. Nimble fingers brought the old glass to the side, forming a hole just big enough for a spider-enhanced boy. Only when he crawls inside and covers his tracks does Peter take off the mask, hair sticking up wildly and shining in the dull light that filtered into the large space. Gulps of air filled his lungs like he had been deprived of it.

Slowly, still clad in his spider gear, Peter slid down to the ground. Everything ached, not a single limb left untouched with at least one bruise. The dirt and dust that moved under his feet and back should've given him pause when lying down, but the agony was quick to remind him that there weren't many options.

Peter's world was still spinning around, colors blending together to create a cacophony of feelings he didn't particularly feel like investigating.

Huffing and deeply regretting what he was about to do, he sat up. With the motion brought on a new set of pain, Peter's ribs protesting wildly and eliciting a loud groan from him. Gingerly he held onto his side sounding like a kicked puppy as he got up and staggered into his small burrow in the corner of the room.

All of his clothes were thrown on the ground in the shape of a bed, Ben's jacket laying on top of everything acting as his makeshift blanket. Trinkets littered the area as reminders for whenever nightmares would come and Peter would wake up screaming confused and lost.

(Those nights, in his opinion, were the hardest.)

Despite the poor nature of things, the space was relatively homely. Out of the entire empty warehouse, the small section that was always hidden from light is the place that brought him the most comfort.

However, comfort wasn't on Peter's mind as he threw himself on the rickety table a few feet away from his bed, sending materials clattering to the ground. His lungs burned in protest from the movements, ribs reminding him that they're likely to upgrade from being just bruised if he doesn't take it easy.

The world slowed down, but it was all still too much.

Peter stripped out of his costume, wincing and grimacing the entire time. Once he worked up enough strength, he finally took a look over his wrecked body.

Almost two months of conserving food with a high metabolism had taken its toll. Peter's once thinly agile body was now just demoted to skeleton status. His bones protruded strongly against his skin, which looked like it was two seconds away from ripping away and letting him fade into nothing. Any injuries acquired from being Spiderman refused to heal on its regular speed due to the lack of nutrition, putting him at a disadvantage and letting bruises take weeks to heal. Cuts were even more dangerous than before, now scarring over after long periods of time. Peter feared the day he would be too slow and eventually get shot.

Every inhale and exhale looked and sounded awful, and all Peter could do was hope that it wouldn't hurt as much later.

Food and supplies ran out four days ago. Soon, he would have to use the emergency cash. Peter Parker would be forced to emerge out of the dark corner that he was pushed into, and go out without his vigilante outfit and become one with the public once more. The thought alone sent a chill going up his gangly spine.

Maybe he could wait longer before things become dire... Maybe he wouldn't have to spend any cash.

But as Peter stood up and promptly tripped, stumbled and yelped, he threw the thought out the window. Fuck malnourishment.

And as Peter slammed into his makeshift bed a little too hard and jarred all of his injuries, he decided that maybe homelessness was worse than he anticipated.

Yet his world still spun around, rocking and tumbling and sending everything down into a harsh

spiral.

There was a supposed drug ring near Hell's Kitchen. Peter had heard rumors when he walked along the streets, heard criminals talking about it being the "salvation" they needed. Drugs and safety were promised as long as they were compliant with orders.

Peter spent weeks gathering information from whoever. Criminals were less inclined to help him, but after a few punches that landed with a sickening finality, they eventually gave in. As a reward, they were left outside hospitals rather than the nearest precinct.

News outlets had finally picked up on his movements, Karen once told him. Headline after headline fluttered across the bottom of screens throughout New York, questioning the sudden shift in Spiderman. Erratic movements with no set destination, more criminals ending up needing medical attention. They've also picked up on how Spidey has been.. Slacking. Taking more hits than usual, unusual silence from the hero rather than the playful quips the citizens grew to either love or loathe.

"Is Spiderman still giving it his all, or is he slowly losing himself in the heat of battle? Maybe he's just purposefully acting like this as a way to get New York to once again turn on him, so he can disappear and return to a normal life." One reporter said.

Peter wanted to laugh at that one. Even if that were the case, he wouldn't have a normal life to turn to. Not after everything.

"Maybe he's having some wifely issues? Going through a divorce. I'm sure even Spidey has someone he loves, I mean, why would he be out protecting the city if there wasn't someone in there worth protecting?"

That one had Peter stopping on the side of a roof, breathing labored as flashes of May clouded his vision.

She was the last person he loved.

"Look at that! He could've easily dodged that hit!"

The News Anchor's face disappeared behind a shaky film taken from a random person's phone camera. It was from a fight a couple of days ago, one that Peter was to this day unsure if he was well equipped for. There was a giant mind controlled herd of animals rampaging through the streets of Queens, trying and failing to hurt anyone in their paths. Any time they got close, Spiderman would sweep in and save the screaming civilian.

Most, if not all, of the animals were already knocked out and webbed up. The camera focused on the man behind it all, who was glaring angrily at the vigilante. A vile scream ripped from his throat as he swung at Spiderman, successfully landing on his chest and sending him reeling back several feet onto the ground.

The footage froze, and the News Anchors face was back on screen.

"He didn't harm the animals any more than he could've, took little to no damage in fighting a literal mind controlled rhinoceros, yet goes down with a singular hit from a non-enhanced individual? Keep up with the times, Spidey. You're looking rather weak."

Peter rolled his eyes and moved to the next clip.

"I don't know, Dave," One reporter started, turning to her coworker. "He's looking a little on the... Malnourished side."

Dave laughed, flashing his bright teeth that seemed to shine in the studio light. "That's part of the job, Susan! You think he gets fat doing all those flips and lunges? Hell, i'm married and even i'll admit that that boy has some curves that the spandex do nothing to hide!"

Laughs and sounds of agreement filled the office as Susan looked uncertain, muttering an "I don't know, guys.." Before eventually moving onto more news.

Peter was used to comments about his suit and how it accentuated his muscled body, but for some reason comments about how he looked better after practically starving himself always made him boil with irrational anger. Like a fury that boiled under his skin, wanting to come out and show what exactly he could do.

"He's working himself to the bone saving us. That kind of thing sticks with you. Affects you physically, mentally, and every in between. Soon enough, he's gonna drop. And hopefully someone

will be there to catch Spiderman when he falls.”

It had been twelve weeks since Peter went on the run. Three months. Three months since he was forced to get over his fear of being alone, forced to learn how to rationalize food and water, forced to give up his life.

On the night of the official mark of three months, Peter was perched on top of a lamp post hiding his position in front of the abandoned building where the drug ring was.

“Alright Karen, what do you got for me?” He asked quietly, squinting to try to look inside the grimy windows. However, even with his enhanced sight, there was no hope of penetrating through the darkness and seeing inside.

“There are twenty-nine heat signatures in total, fourteen armed. There also appears to be mild explosives in the building, along with copious amounts of illegal cocaine. Should I alert Mr. Stark of the dangers and ask for assistance?” Karen rambled off as requested. Peter rolled his eyes at her suggestion, shooting out a “you already know the answer to that, hun.”

Having Mr. Stark here will only show the man that he was weak. He couldn’t handle himself.

It’ll show him something is wrong. Peter can’t handle that.

Karen almost sounded worried with a tinge of anger when she next spoke, saying “Stay safe, Peter.”

An involuntary smile makes its way on his face at the comment, but it quickly falls when Peters face morphs into a determined one.

Come on, Peter. You’ve got this. You’re Spiderman. You’ve dealt with worse.

Following this mantra, Peter extended his arm and shot a web next to the building, shooting forward and sticking to the side of the wall. He stayed there for a few minutes listening for any

guards that may alert anyone of his position, only moving once he determined it safe.

Crawling up to the second floor was easy. Opening the creaky window inconspicuously was harder. With every small tick, his enhanced hearing made it seem like a bomb was going off rather than the near-silent sound. Logically he knew that there was nobody on this floor; he checked in the small opening. The floor was dark, but lights shone from the way downstairs.

Voices mingled together with sounds of heavy lifting, creating an amalgamation of vibrations that Peter could hear and feel through his hands.

“Peter,” Karen whispered. “There seems to be a new presence in the building.”

Spidey finally had the window open wide enough so he could sneak through, grimacing at the moldy floor. *Light steps or wall crawling, I guess.* Almost as an afterthought, he responded “Friend or enemy?” while crawling to the center of the room where there was a hole that opened to downstairs and- *Wow.* That was a *lot* of drugs.

Peter blanched for a second, seeing all of the containers filled with at least twenty-pound bags of cocaine. Almost the entire floor was covered with the containers, the only areas where the floor was accessible was where the criminals were walking through.

Karen highlighted the armed enemies, choosing not to answer his previous question. Mapping out the best path was easy, disarming them all while not getting harmed was the problem. Even with his spidey sense there to aid him, it was looking near impossible to take on all of these guys without getting harmed.

Three cheers for a halfway working super healing, Peter bitterly thought. Squinting his eyes, he got in position to drop down and take out at least two of the men on his descent. “Alright Karen, get ready because things are about to get hectic.”

Without waiting for a response, Peter exhaled deeply and dropped straight into danger.

Instantly he twisted in mid-air, shooting out webs and taking two guns before spinning and whacking the men, knocking them out instantly. He landed flawlessly in his Spidey position on a crate filled with cocaine, bags slightly dipping at the newfound weight.

“Hey, guys! Surprise! It’s me!” He shouted cheerfully, watching the criminals turn in his direction. There was a mix of fear and anger, and Peter didn’t have to wait long before his spidey sense told him to *MOVE* just in time for a bullet to whizz past him.

Spidey backflipped behind the container, surprising the guy trying to sneak behind him. “Wasn’t expecting me? The honorary guest?!” He asked dramatically, feigning hurt. A solid punch sent the man sprawling against the side of the building, webs trapping him almost instantly. “I’m hurt. Truly!”

He shook his head sadly, not even looking up before webbing the next person who was trying to run up to his side. By now there were shouts in a different language, one man seemingly giving commands to everyone else to either attack or get the drugs. Karen helpfully started translating for him, supplying that it was a rare form of Russian.

“ *Get the Spider, use whatever methods necessary to stop him!*” He growled out, spit flying from his mouth. Peter made a disgusted noise as a group of seven flanked him, five wielding guns.

Okay. Peter thought, maybe a little over my head here.

There was no time for any planning, his spidey sense lighting up the back of his neck and sending him to the side. A second later, a man was where he just was with a fist raised high. Unperturbed by the sudden lack of vigilante in his hands, he turned to Peter.

Suddenly, all seven men were on his case, sending his spidey sense into overtime. Dodge a fist, duck under that bullet. A few people handed hits randomly over his frail body, one sending a particularly hard kick to his ribs and leaving him breathless.

Peter switched to offensive and knocked two guys to the ground, laughingly shouting out taunts for the others. Shortly after he was able to wrangle up the guns, making it a semi-fair fight. In the background, he heard the leader yell “*Bring out-!*” The name was lost on his ears as one guy conveniently was able to slam into him, sending Peter flying into the side of a container.

He let out a groan, before his eyes widened as his hearing picked up something he didn’t think he’d hear again.

The man with the heart murmur.

Everything seemed to go to shit after that moment.

Caught off guard, Peter didn't realize that there was a bag of white flying towards his face until it was too late. He felt the impact more than anything, head slamming against the back of the container with the force of the blow. His nose started throbbing, and not thinking anything of it, he let a harsh breath in to block the pain.

His mask was no doubt covered with the contents in the bag, but Peter couldn't focus. Why couldn't he focus? His world was spinning and the men started walking up to his slumped body, and- *was that an arm?*

"Woah" he breathed out, trying to use the side of the container to hoist his heavy body up. "Are you- like- can you remove your arm? Like Bucky?" The men seemed to laugh at him, taunting in a way Peter didn't really like.

Why was everything loopy?

"Oh god, please don't chase me up the wall with your wacky arm. That'd give me nightmares for *weeks*." Peter attempted to joke, hearing focusing on the heart murmur. Whoever it was was hiding with the boss, most likely helping him escape.

"Peter." Karen's voice broke through his foggy mind like a beacon of light. Slowly and lazily he dodged a punch, somehow webbing the perpetrator up. "You need to escape as soon as possible. You've ingested a serious amount of supplements, and unconsciousness is inevitable."

Supplements?

Peter blanched. *Drug ring.*

He practically *ate cocaine* with his *nose* and was *fighting* for his *life*.

"God, this day couldn't get any worse!" Peter screamed to nobody, sending out a web bomb close enough to capture the rest of the criminals.

And such as Parker luck is, the doors on the side of the building slammed open, greeting at least fifty other men who were *not* happy about their spider infestation.

Spiderman's stance was wobbly as he groaned, suddenly deciding that if he ever got back to his dinky warehouse he would *never* complain about *anything* ever again.

"Get him!"

And almost instantly the building was filled with battle cries and shaky webs.

To be fair, Peter held up pretty well in his heavily drugged up state. A huge section of the men were incapacitated and stuck to a surface, the others all still ganging up on the red-clad vigilante. Gunshots echoed, followed by loud shouts of indignation from their wanna-be victim. It seemed like his Spidey sense was the only reason why Peter was still alive.

However, he couldn't help the slowness in his movements and the spinning of his world as a bullet lodged into his shoulder, sending him crashing from his web-slinging. Men started advancing on his position, hope on getting out of the situation quickly dwindling.

Mind betraying him at the worst possible moment, he wondered if he would follow up with the tradition of dying to a bullet.

Oh God, oh no, no God please no, no no no n-

The lights cut off.

Men started shouting in confusion, losing sight of Spiderman.

Something wasn't right, Peter spidey sense helpfully supplied. Karen went silent as well, HUD flashing to show him out of the corner of his eye where he was injured.

There were sounds of struggling. Fighting. *Were they turning on eachother?*

Peter couldn't think straight. His heartbeat was slowing, he was losing too much blood. *Was he only hit in his shoulder?*

"It's him! The Devil!"

Oh, Peter thought ruefully. Maybe Heaven was too full for me.

He couldn't move. He lost feeling in his limbs, feeling like he was on cloud nine and *was that the drugs or was he dying?*

It was quiet. Too quiet. Even with his enhanced hearing (Which he supposed wasn't really enhanced anymore since everything sounded like a muffled mess) all he could make out was his heartbeat and the pounding of singular footsteps.

Of course i'd die on a mission, higher than my metabolism. Typical Parker luck.

Peter could barely make out hands on his body, twisting and shifting him. His eyes cracked blearily as he tried to hone in on whoever was jostling him, but all he could make out was red and horns. *They weren't kidding, the Devil really is here to take me down.*

A deep voice tried to break its way through his subconscious, but it was futile. Peter was swimming, and oh *God* that should scare him more than it did because last time he was swimming he couldn't move and couldn't breathe and it was *so cold and he was going to die-*

Peter fell unconscious, the sounds of Karen and The Devil fading out.

The last thing he noticed about death, is that there weren't any bright lights to greet him. No loved ones there to hug him, nothing stopping him from slipping.

All there was, was a strange irregular beating.

Teach Me How To Live

Chapter Summary

“I’m a Silhouette, asking every now and then: Is it over yet? Will I ever feel again?”

Chapter Notes

oh thank GOD I finished this. Longest chapter i’ve written, like, ever! And (good for you guys, bad for me) the chapters are only gonna be longer :,)

Without further ado, alleys welcome in Matt and Tony!

I made a playlist for this story! Have a listen!

<https://open.spotify.com/user/22hs6fpem3qw452sj42xrgna/playlist/3LavvvabRrkJOvVhyPb7w1?si=t9edyarlQ7-pbu6rns4e7Q>

Also, starting next chapter, i’ll have a beta! Which means less mistakes in writing and revisions on my plans for the chapters. So, look out for that :,)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“-n, kid. You’re not dy-..”

“-the fuck? Matt! How did th-..”

“Lost- ..-ot ..-bloo-..”

“You’re-.. ..-okay, Spiderm-...”

The movies and books had lied.

The first thing that Peter registered wasn't the excruciating pain that's coupled with a bullet wound. It wasn't the thoughts of "Where am I? What happened?" It wasn't even him worrying that someone had found out his identity.

The first thing he registered was how *sad* he was that he woke up.

Peter felt his heartbeat pick up slightly with the thought, but he couldn't find it in himself to care. Because with that crippling realization came the onslaught of sensory.

His skin felt sticky against the fabric of whatever was covering the lower half of his body. It didn't feel like his suit, and a part of him panicked before realizing that he could feel each particle of hair matted on his head still. He was at least wearing his mask. The brush of chills that ran up his arms and chest let him know that he was shirtless, and the scratchiness against the bullet hole told him that at least he's been wrapped up and treated.

Underneath him was a soft surface, the tiny folds of separating cushions supplying that he was on a couch. He fit almost perfectly stretched out over it, his feet slightly turned to the side.

And *God*. Peter could hear everything.

He didn't even have his eyes open yet and he could tell that whoever took him put him in an apartment building. The neighbors downstairs were taking a shower. Across the hall, a cat scratched at the owner's chair. His own heartbeat rang steadily in his ears, and if he barely focused the sounds of blood rushing through his veins sounded like a waterfall.

The outside sounded hectic as all hell, meaning it was probably in the middle of the day. There was a billboard nearby, the static reaching Peters' ears and momentarily causing him to grunt and twist his face in pain.

his breaths came quickly, panic finally settling in. Why was he taking in so much sensory? Why wasn't his bullet wound healed?

You haven't eaten anything in a while, dummy.

Peter wanted to roll his eyes at the semi answer to his last question, but that didn't answer his first.

Belatedly his mind woke up from its apparent slumber, reminding him that *yes*, he had his mask on. Which means, subsequently, Karen.

He called for his wonderful AI, wincing at how absolutely *fucked* his voice sounded. Had he only slept through a couple of hours, or was he out for an entire week? His vocal cords sounded destroyed and it was only then did he realize how dry his throat was. As he proceeded to start coughing out a lung or two, he heard Karen ask “Are you with me, Peter?”

“Karen! Ini- Initiate proto-*fucking hell*- protocol Senso-Shut Out!”

Instantly everything became muffled, Peters heightened senses taking a metaphorical breath of fresh air. Which, ironically enough, was what Peter couldn’t seem to get. With the protocol in place (Thanks, Tony), the teen finally risked opening his eyes, relieved that everything seemed to be coated in comfortable darkness.

His eyes fitted throughout the room, landing on the kitchen. There was a simple bar separating it from the living room, the top curve of the sink blending in with all of the glasses and drinks littered on top.

Peter all but rolled off of the couch, groaning when the sudden push of hardwood floor smacked into his side and jarred his injuries. A brief wave of dizziness had the room tilting, only calming down to be replaced with another coughing fit. His ribs hurt, his lunged begged for release, and Peter thought he could hear footsteps approaching the door.

Shakily he reached for the side of the couch, using it to help prop him on his knees and bring his other arm to wrap around his waist. True to his senses, the door opened shortly after. There was a muttered “*shit*,” before the pounding of feet filled the empty space in between Peter’s cough fit. Rough, calloused hands (*those hands reminded him of someone, but there’s no way because he-*) wrapped around his shoulders, propping then teen up and letting his head slap the back of the couch.

Peter croaked out “Wa- Water...” and shortly after, the footsteps receded. The sound of the tap being turned on brought a twinge of happiness, which only swelled when the figure came back and gently lifted his mask to his nose and brought the glass to Peter’s face, cold water slipping between his chapped lips. Almost instantly there was a relief that he hadn’t felt in *so* long, Peter actually considered that he did in fact die, and this was his nicely twisted retribution.

It took a few more minutes, but eventually Peter's sore throat was satiated and he was able to take deep breaths without the fear of having another cough attack. Karen was quiet, but even with his eyes closed, Peter could tell that she was displaying his vitals. It was only then did he realize that those gruff hands weren't anywhere on him. Just by listening and feeling the guys heat that radiated off of his body, Peter could tell that he was sitting by him, one arm slung across the side of the couch while the rest of his body was curled up.

"Jesus, kid" the guy started. Peter let out another weak groan as he opened his eyes once more, eyes staying on the ceiling. "I was worried that you'd keel over and die just now."

Peter noticed that the guy next to him had a nice voice. With the few short words, he could already tell that this dude was made for talking. Soothing, yet rough like his hands. Crackly like wood on fire, emitting feelings of comfort and safety. *Home*, his mind helpfully supplied. And yet, in the undertones of those few syllables, Peter could feel the darkness that shadowed him. How, when angered, those comforting feelings would be deserted for something more animalistic and terrifying.

He found himself wanting to trust that voice, despite not knowing anything about the owner.

Almost like a golf ball hit him in the head, Peter came to the realization that he could finally get answers. He opened his mouth, closed it trying to formulate a good first question, before trying once more. "How... How am I still alive?" As an afterthought, he quietly added, "Karen, turn off protocol, but slowly." Wordlessly she complied, and Peter's world began to become brighter. Louder. Everything that it normally is.

"Well Spidey, can I call you that?" Before Peter could answer, the man barreled on. "You took out a drug ring in Hell's Kitchen, apparently. Nice going by the way. Managed to get shot towards the end, but details." He waved his hand nonchalantly at the end, barely making it through Peter's periphery. "After, I don't know. All I know is that you were on my doorstep with a sticky note. No idea what it said, but I have a feeling that the person that was waiting with you was Daredevil."

Peter almost scoffed at the man. "You have a feeling? He's pretty noticeable with the horns, y'know. It'd take a blind man to no- *oh*." He'd finally turned to face the man, the eyes on his suit widening comically in time with his as he instantly noticed the large glasses on his face, along with how the hand that wasn't nestled in his hair was holding a cane. *For blind people*. Peter turned red quicker than he could take a large breath, spilling out "oh my gosh, i'm so sorry! That was so rude, and I didn't know! I hope--"

A large smile broke out on the man's face as he laughed breathlessly, shaking his head. "Don't worry about it. Now, as I was saying before I was rudely interrupted,--" he pointed towards Peter's direction, eyebrows going up and over the rim of his red tinted glasses. "-I patched you up and laid

you on my couch, where you've been for the past two days. You've been drifting in and out of consciousness, which was worrisome. But I had a friend who came by and who is more equipped at this stuff than I am. She said it was just because your body needed time to rest, something with it not having enough nutrients?"

Peter's mouth was wide open, openly gaping. His mask was still pushed up to his nose, but he supposed it didn't matter. In one swift motion the mask was on the ground, his hair flying every which direction. Why would Daredevil help him? More importantly, drop him off at a blind guy's house? *Something isn't adding up...*

His genius brain was finally functioning at full capacity, all earlier grogginess gone with the new information he'd obtained. "Did.. Did you take off your mask?" The guy asked, and *Lordy* he needed to learn his name. "Y-yeah... Figured there'd be no problem here with a secret identity, right?" He chuckled at the end, seeing the corners of the blind man's mouth quirk up. "I suppose not. By the way, in case you were wondering, my name is Matt. Matt Murdock."

Matt, as it turned out, could get around fairly well for a blind guy.

He helped Peter back on the couch and went to order some Chinese, as well as looking through his drawers for something that may be vaguely teenager sized.

Peter had to give him props when he came back with a simple long-sleeved black shirt and a pair of sweats. For someone who couldn't see what Peter looked like, he sure knew what clothes would fit him best. He'd eventually chalked it up to what Matt said earlier about helping him with his bullet wound. Maybe he had a chance when removing his shirt to get a rough estimate.

That, all on its own, made Peter flustered. He felt severely underdressed on the small couch, shirtless while Matt looked pristine in his suit no doubt meant for whatever job he had.

"Shower's that way," Matt directed towards a door Peter didn't previously see, "you can go and take care of yourself after we eat, alright?" He turned in the direction where the teen was, taking off his glasses. Across the room, Peter couldn't see any emotion in his chocolate eyes. He just dumbly nodded, hastily adding "yeah, yeah sure" after realizing what he'd done.

Talking to a person without sight sure had shown Peter how many things he'd taken for advantage

when communicating with other people.

Peter removed his bandages eventually, hissing with the sting the action brought along. “Hey- hey kid, that’s not a smart idea.” Within a few seconds Matt had crossed the space from the kitchen to the living room, feeling around for the couch. Once he got there, he awkwardly grabbed onto Peter’s shoulder, stopping him from moving too much. Slowly, his hands fluttered down to the bandage in the young boy’s hands, grabbing the material and sighing. “Your wound is still fresh. It needs to be wrapped.”

Peter looked down, and lo and behold, Matt was right. The bullet wound had healed slightly, but not nearly what it used to do. “Sorry, used to having super healing. Normally that’ll be cleared up with a good night’s rest.” At that comment, Matt cocked his head to the side and furrowed his brows. And in those few seconds, Peter understood why he wore glasses.

It wasn’t to obscure his face. It wasn’t a big public reminder that he was blind. It wasn’t even for a fashion statement, although Peter had to admit that they looked pretty badass when hitting the right light. No, when Peter looked in those dark brown eyes, he could read Matt like a book. They displayed him, put him out there in a way that the teenager could only pin on another certain tinted-glasses-loving guy. He could see pain, *so* much of it. Betrayal, unbridled anger, and even a bit of something darker hiding underneath the veil. But first and foremost, he could spot the concern and confusion, no doubt brought on by Peter’s earlier statement.

“You have.. Super healing..” Matt finally got out, unaware of Peter’s direct eye contact. The younger boy let out a breathless laugh at the man’s confusion. “Superhuman. A mutant if you read the Daily Bugle. I was bitten by a radioactive spider, got a bunch of abilities.”

God.

Why did Peter ever open his mouth?

Instead of judging him though, Matt just let out a hum of confirmation. He flailed around a bit on the coffee table trying to reach for clean bandages, but eventually retrieved what he was searching for. “Backtracking a bit,” he started, “used to? Did you lose your abilities?”

He delicately mapped out the skin around Peter’s wound, only sending a shrill of discomfort through the teen. When he got to the approximate area, he started gingerly taking care of him once more. “In a way,” Peter cryptically stated. “Haven’t been eating enough. Without the necessary nutrients, some of my abilities falter. Checks out with what your doctor friend said, by the way. Nice going for her to catch that at first glance.”

Rather than a chuckle like Peter expected, all he got was a frown. Eek. Luckily before he could say anything else that may upset his caregiver, the doorbell rang signifying that their food arrived. Matt cocked his head towards the door once more (a habit that tingled the back of Peter's memories, who else did that?) before getting up, throwing on his glasses and touching the walls to get to the entrance. He opened the door, grabbed the food and thanked the deliverer, and brought it back to the living room.

He laid out all of the food, Peter's stomach letting itself be known. Of all times, of course it was now. He reddened instantly and hoped that Matt didn't hear his wailing. If he did, he didn't comment.

"Alright Spidey. I'll make a deal with you. You answer a few questions, and in exchange, I'll share. Sound good?" Matt turned to face Peter, eyebrows raised once more. *Oh God, one of these days they'll disappear in his hairline.*

Peter thought about his options, and couldn't find anything bad. "Alright, although no questions about my identity. Despite not being able to see me, you could still give out my name and that's a no bueno." At his choice of words, Matt chuckled, flashing his white teeth and *God* he reminded Peter *so* much of a certain playboy. "Of course, I respect your decision. First question," he clasped his hands together, bringing his arms so they could rest on his knees. A smart choice for showing that he meant everything in a friendly sense, and he would probably be asking personal questions. "Where is your family at?"

At that, Peter stilled. His heartbeat picked up, and he swore he saw Matt cock his head as if he could hear his internal backtracking. He couldn't tell him flat out that his entire bloodline was lost. That he was the remaining survivor of the Parker bloodline. Gulping, he decided to skirt around the answer. "My parents are dead. I live alone." The truth, but probably not what Matt was expecting. He just shook his head in acceptance before continuing.

"And where do you live at? Somewhere you can easily access on the ground from here, I hope." Peter wanted to laugh, and he almost did. Subconsciously he went to go check his webshooters, only to be met with the realization he was, in fact, still suitless. Once more, he didn't give Matt an exact answer. "On the outskirts of Queens, I don't exactly know where we're at so I don't know if it's close by or not. And I can just web back to my place, it'll be shorter and I'll probably have enough anyway. I don't think I wasted a lot in my drug heist."

Matt seemed unsatisfied with the answer, but didn't dig deeper. Instead he said "One more question, alright? And no, before you ask, that one doesn't count." It was almost like he could sense Peter's cheeky smile before he continued. "Why haven't you been eating enough? You have an enhanced metabolism from what I've gathered, and it's not in your best interest to be eating less

than the average human.”

“God, are you a lawyer?” Peter jokingly asked to cover the anxiety that rippled under his skin. Thankfully Matt took the bait, smiling and waving his hands outward. “You caught me. Now, answer the question, the food’s getting cold.”

At the mention of food, Peters' stomach let out another pathetic wail. He tried to cover it with a cough, but ultimately knew it was fruitless. “I.. Don’t have enough money for food.” *Lie.* “Actually, I do. But I have to rationalize, y’know? Recently lost the source of income and haven’t had any luck finding another. Too bad being a hero doesn’t pay in anything but praise, am I right?”

He didn’t expect Matt to get it, but the man laughed anyways. “Yeah, I hear you. Now let's dig in.”

It wasn’t long into their meal when Matt got a call on his phone.

The automated voice chanted *Foggy, Foggy*, and Peter briefly wondered the origins of a name like that one. He apologized and said it was important, someone from work. Peter brushed him off saying it was okay and he didn’t have to let it go to voicemail just because he was there. Matt once more said he was sorry before getting up and heading towards the door, muttering “Foggy, what d'you got?”

Peter reveled in the few moments of peace, sighing contently. He was fed, he was going to shower soon, and he could already feel some of his strength coming back.

An undetermined amount of time later had Matt coming back into the apartment, going to his bedroom only to come out with a briefcase. “Where are you going?” Peter couldn’t help but asking, helping the man get to his walking cane. He seemed to be in a rush, and it only served to bring up more questions. Like what the hell had a lawyer rushing out of his apartment at damn near ten at night?

“There’s an issue at the office. I’ll be back as soon as I can. I’ll even see to it that someone comes and checks on you, alright?” He shrugged his suit jacket on, already opening the door for a hasty retreat. “Don’t get yourself killed, Spidey.”

Peter smiled and shot back “right back at ya, Matty” before watching him leave. He couldn’t help but want to cringe at the reminder that the lawyer didn’t know his name. It felt like he did, but Peter chalked that up to the fact that he was in his house, maskless.

His enhanced senses went on a spree for a second, getting a fresh kicking in the ass with the rejuvenation of his powers. The lights were too bright, and he could hear the cars beeping outside. Peter could taste the food on his tongue still, and could feel the air nipping at his exposed skin once more. But the weird thing about it all, was the weird smell coming from Matt’s briefcase. It smelt like... Like a suit. His spidey suit, but... Not his suit.

After a few carefully measured breaths, his senses dialed themselves down once more and allowed the superhero peace once more.

With Matt still gone two hours later, Peter found himself growing bored.

He still had yet to shower, but in all honesty the prospect of peeling himself off of the couch seemed like too much effort. He’d laid there, just basking in the soft glow the billboard outside cast on the darkness in the room while he waited, soaking in the ambiance of the apartment. Peter couldn’t remember the last time he was this calm, and didn’t want to wait for the next time he’d feel like this again. With the food still digesting in his stomach, his powers were still growing stronger. Something that Peter honestly forgot how it felt.

Due to the serene calmness that seemed to wrap him in a comforting fog, however, it was rather easy to pinpoint the sound of footsteps on the roof.

Opening his previously closed eyes, Peter squinted as he honed in on the shallow steps. Whoever it was definitely knew how to be quiet, probably with years of practice. His back felt a little more rigid, eyes defocusing for a fraction of a second before returning to their usual state. The hairs on his arms rose ever so slightly, spidey sense tingling faintly in his veins. Whoever was on the roof was dangerous, and they were heading for this room.

With quick thinking, Peter grabbed his mask off of the floor and threw it on, not even bothering to greet Karen before asking “give me heat signatures, boo.” Shortly after the room was painted in blue, the figure of a man right outside the door leading to the roof flowing a bright red and orange. “Peter,” his AI started, “I’d advise hiding. It’d be rather rude to start a fight and destroy some of Mr. Murdock’s apartment while he’s gone.” He nodded his head, rushing to climb the wall that was coated in windows. The door jingled and unlocked, allowing the perpetrator in right as Peter

attached himself to the ceiling.

Belatedly he cursed himself for not finding his suit before hiding, wincing with the realization that this position certainly wasn't helping his wound.

With the figure in the room, Karen deactivated heat signature, but it didn't do any good. Even with his enhanced sight, Peter couldn't make out an outline of whoever came in. They blended in perfectly with the eerie darkness that wasn't touched by the billboard outside. All that Peter had going for him was that he could hear their heartbeat still, meaning he had a rough estimate on their location.

"Spiderman," the man started. Peters' eyebrows ruffled together in confusion, wondering how they knew he was there and why the voice seemed familiar. They started moving towards the stairs, intent on coming down.

Before the figure could fully be seen, Peter lunged off of the ceiling intent on attacking. Luckily, whoever the guy was sure as hell wasn't expecting the attack, so when Peter landed a punch to their face, they stumbled back in surprise. It wasn't until the spider-themed hero lunged once more did the intruder snap into action, intent on stopping him.

Peter, sensing that the man was about to grab him, turned last second to lack a kick in his side. Both parties groaned, as the man tumbled down the stairs and Peter angered his wound. Only when he looked down at the attacker did he gasp, eyes widening with guilt.

"Daredevil, oh my gosh!" Peter jumped down the flight of stairs in one fluid motion, landing in a crouch at the bottom step. Daredevil had yet to get up, instead catching his breath. "I had no idea it was you, I couldn't see through that darkness that mysteriously is only on that flight, and oh *God* this isn't even my apartment and I thought that someone was breaking in and-" Peter stopped himself, feeling a panic attack slowly ebbing its way in. He sucked in a deep breath and willed his heart to slow down, regaining his composure in a matter of seconds.

By now, the Devil of Hell's Kitchen was on his knees, using his elbows to hoist himself up. "Remind me to never, and I mean *never*, fight you when you're at full strength," Daredevil all but wheezed, low voice pricking Peters' ears. He said nothing above a whisper, yet the words seemed to echo throughout the apartment. "How... How do you know i'm not at my best capacity?" Spidey asked, squinting suspiciously. Had Matt ratted him out?

"That bullet wound says you're not at full strength. Coincidentally, the bullet wound that you happened to re-open while flinging yourself towards the shadows."

“Oh- ah, seems about right.”

Daredevil scoffed at the teenager before turning serious again. “Go grab the bandages, i’ll patch you up. Can’t have you bleeding everywhere.”

At that, Peter scurried to the couch before regrouping, feeling guilty as he heard the strained breaths coming from the winded man in front of him.

The duo moved like they had been doing this for years, each falling into the same routine. It was obvious that both parties knew both sides of the dance, either giving medical treatment or receiving it. In a matter of minutes, Spiderman’s bandages were swapped out and Daredevil was throwing away the old ones.

Once settled in once more, Peter turned to Daredevil. “Thank you. For, y’know, saving my ass in that drug ring. And not kicking the living daylights out of me just now.” A smile bit the corners of Daredevil’s mouth, but nothing else. The only acknowledgment the teenager received was a simple head nod. The red-clad vigilante leaned back, content with the silence between the two.

Which was why it was odd that he was the one who broke it, and not Peter.

“Kid,-“

Peter butted in with a slightly serious voice, “i’m not a kid.”

He received a glare (or what he could only guess was a glare) and quickly shut up, letting the other man continue with his sentence.

“As I was saying, *kid* ,-“ Peter groaned in frustration “- there’s a reason I brought you to Matt instead of a rinky dinky hospital. He’s a lawyer, and a damn good one. He’ll be able to help you file for Emancipation.”

At the suggestion, Peters' mouth dropped. *There’s absolutely no way Daredevil was able to figure out his life.* “I’m sorry- what? Emancipation? Yeah, I think you’ve truly lost it, no offense. Like I told Matt earlier, I have a place to live. I lost my source of income, but there are still opportunities

for more. I'm happy. And there's no way that--

"I know you're homeless."

"Wha- how??"

"You smell homeless, kid."

With his wounded ego, Peter lifted his arm to smell. True to his word, the teen realized he really *did* smell. He crinkled his nose in mild disgust when Daredevil cut back in. "I'm sorry- but did you- did you just *sniff* yourself?"

The man seemed to be at a loss for words, mouth hanging open in confusion. Of course, Spidey would be able to throw off the man with a reputation for being the scariest shit you'll ever see. He sheepishly shrugged and nodded, adding "I was gonna shower earlier, but then Matt left and I was going to wait for him!"

Daredevil sighed in defeat, muttering "*God, just take this man already.*" Peter pretended not to hear the jab, instead focusing on the smell around the room. Was his stench radiating?

The teen found that no, he wasn't stinking up the entire room (just a small radius. A very, very small one). But then, he caught a whiff of something else. His suit, but...

No way.

Peter leaned forward suddenly, inhaling the scent of Daredevil. Said man just jerked back, almost tumbling off the side of the couch, before smacking Peter in the face. "For the love of God, please don't tell me that you just *sniffed* me."

Smiling devilishly, Spidey just said "that I did. Had to make sure it was truly me that smelt, and you weren't contributing to the stench."

A disgusted frown made its way in Daredevils face, before he got up and headed towards the kitchen. "Seriously, go shower. I'm sure you know where it is, along with clothes or whatever."

“Only if you answer a question. A singular question. Uno... Crap. questionnes? I’ve honestly forgotten. Oh! No, I didn’t. Uno preguntas?”

The other man looked like he wanted to be anywhere but here. “Fine. One, and *only* one.” He raised his pointer finger to show the number, before tilting it so it pointed at Peter warningly.

“How weird is it for you to talk in third person, Matty?”

“Oh for *fuck's sake*.”

It had been three days since Peter had woken up from getting shot, and three days since he’s lived with Matt. Who is, coincidentally, Daredevil.

it’d been two days since his bullet wound had finally healed completely. The meals that Peter had definitely helped his powers get up and running properly again, but he’d still consider himself weak from his normal standards.

And it had been one day since Matt had brought up the topic of Emancipation once again.

“I could help you,” Matt said, looking over his coffee mug. “You qualify for Emancipation. Except for the job part, but we’ll work on that one.”

“I don’t need to be dependant on anyone, and I don’t need help.” Peter answered petulantly, hanging upside down from his web on the ceiling. Rolling his eyes, Matt answered “exactly! And that’s what emancipation will guarantee. Don’t you want to live outside of Spiderman again? Be able to go to school, see your friends?”

He knew he said the wrong thing when Peter abruptly stilled, shoulders going tense. The teenager gained a far away look to his eyes, no longer in the present. Matt, feeling how the air around Peter shifted, decided to try to gain the boys’ attention once more.

“So.. Wrong idea. How about we talk about something else? Like when you-”

Peter cut him off, falling from his web ungracefully. “I- I need to go.. Do something- anything.” It was clear he was in fight or flight mode, and his senses were telling him to run as far away as possible. He collected himself off of the floor quickly before scurrying to Matt’s bedroom to grab his spidey suit. “No, Peter- wait!” At that point, Matt had abandoned his mug in favor for rushing towards the struggling teen, unsure on what exactly was needed at the moment. Was it mentioning school that set him off, or was it his friends?

Matt felt himself falter for a fraction of a second with realization, but that was all it took. Peter pressed the spider symbol in the middle of his chest and the suit morphed to his form, Karen turning online. As soon as Matt reached the juncture between his bedroom and the living room, it was too late.

Peter was already gone, and there was no telling how long the grief-stricken boy would be out.

And that’s how Peter webbed up criminals and saved people for over twelve hours.

His stomach was empty, and already he could feel how his powers were slowly deteriorating because of the amount of exercise he’s done with no breaks. He’s slipped up a few times and gotten hit by a few bad guys, but it was nothing fatal. Just a few bruises and one gentle stab wound. (Peter asked himself if there was such thing as a ‘gentle’ stab wound, but looking at the cut that delicately ran across his bicep, he decided that there’s a possibility.)

Finally calmed down enough to think rationally, he realized that Matt was just trying to look out for him. And of course, like the idiot he was, panicked and ran. Feeling insanely guilty for just mooching off of the older man for the past couple of days only to hightail it without so much as an explanation, Peter prepared a long apology which consisted of him getting on his knees and thanking Matt for everything.

But right as he jumped off of the bodega he was crouched on, Karen alerted him of a supposive kidnapping involving chitauri tech. Never one to ignore such materials, Spidey decided that his apology could use a little refining, switching directions to fling himself where the alert came from.

Within two minutes Spiderman was face to face with a suspicious looking alley, Karen alerting

him that this was the last location known. “Alright Karen, enhance hearing by 15 percent.” With the small boost to his already enhanced hearing, it was easy to hear the whirring of a machine closer to the back of the alley. “Yeesh, time to go!”

With that, Peter sprinted in the alley to assess the situation. However, he sure as hell wasn’t expecting to run face first into a... Force field?

Rubbing his (probably broken) nose and cursing, Peter tapped the invisible barrier. Sure enough, two ripples of energy surged after the motion, showcasing the force field. “Karen, locate any weak spots, along with heat signatures to determine if there’s anyone trapped inside.”

A few seconds later, Karen responded “it seems as though there’s an opening towards the top. I would advise climbing the building to your left to reach it. I’m also only detecting one heat signature, meaning that either the call was a lure or the victim got away. Either way, proceed with caution. I’m also detecting a large amount of energy radiating from a device inside.”

“Alright, cool cool cool,” Peter muttered to himself, attaching himself to the wall Karen directed him to and climbing up. When he got to the top, he saw where Karen outlined the opening. Thanking the Lord for his wonderful AI, he jumped up and down for a few seconds to prep himself before lunging in the circular hole, landing in his classic “Spidey pose.”

Across from him, a man stood watching him with a malicious grin. “Ah, Spiderman! Not the hero I was expecting, but you’ll do.” His hand reached for his pocket, Peter’s spidey sense alerting him that that’s a *bad* idea. “Ah ah ah! Yoink!” Peter exclaimed, webbing the guy’s hand away. He shot towards the back wall, attaching him to the grimy bricks. “And I should be offended! Why wouldn’t you be happy to see your Friendly Neighborhood Spiderman?” He paused, rubbing his chin in faux thought. “Y’know, actually, this isn’t even my neighborhood. So I guess you get a pass.”

The man growled, face turning red with anger. Spidey went up to his pocket, casually mentioning a “no homo” before reaching in and grabbing a simple grey box with a red button in the middle. “This looks like something off of Looney Tunes. Did you make this? For shame.” He tsked as if disappointed in the creation, getting away from the criminal as he started flailing. “No! My plans will not be ruined this quickly!”

Peter chuckled, answering “well it looks like they were. Say, how do you deactivate this force field? My nose isn’t very happy with it, by the way. Is it electromagnetic? Because that’ll be *so* cool and explain why you can’t see it until a subtle-”

“Enough!” The man yelled, eyes alight with fury. Before Peter could process anything, the webs containing his arm broke free, sending the villain towards him. Deftly Spidey dodged out of the way, but it was too late. When moving, he unwillingly left the remote in the open for the man to grab onto. If it weren’t for Peter’s sticking abilities, he’s sure that the remote would be in the other guys’ hands by now.

But actually obtaining the object wasn’t the plan. His web-covered fist slammed into the red button, sending shock waves running through Peter’s systems. He let out a cry of agony, collapsing onto the ground. “Ka-Karen, what the fuck is happening?”

The AI blinked in and out, only getting out the basics (energy around him turned violent, no doubt thanks to the chitauri weapon) before ultimately shutting down. It felt like Peter’s brain had been split in half, remolded together, and then slammed with a brick.

What felt like minutes passed by, and finally the air changed. The energy stopped pulsing through his body, reducing him to a twitching mess. His throat was raw from screaming, body exhausted.

The villain was still standing there, grinning.

With all of his might, Peter turned onto his back, wheezing out “what.. did you do... to me?” Black spots clouded his vision, and he willed them to clear out. He needed to see the guy, see his reaction. Gauge his actions and find out the best way to take him out in this new vulnerable state.

“It’s rather simple, actually.” He started, and thank heavens that this guy was the type to spill out his plans. “I used an energy wave to break through to your subconscious, revealing to me your weaknesses. See, I was really expecting Iron Man or some other high-class hero, not a simple wall-crawler. A waste, if you ask me.”

“Ow, my ego.” Peter sassed back, immediately getting kicked afterward. He winced and groaned, getting out a meek “I deserved that one.”

“It’s amazing what technology can do, isn’t it?” He gestured widely towards the surrounding area, looking rather proud. “Or alien technology, if used correctly.”

And almost as if those few words contained some sort of magic to them, the scene changed.

And much to Peter's horror, it was a *very* familiar, *very, very* , bad scene.

The gun.

The screaming.

The panic, the sheer adrenaline.

The impact, and the sound of bullet ripping through flesh.

The sound, *God*, the sound.

...

Peter realized that someone was screaming. *Was that him?*

He didn't remember that happening. In fact, he's staring at himself. He wasn't screaming then.

Oh.

He realized with a startle that he wasn't screaming in the memory, but rather, he was *actually* screaming. But the thing was, he couldn't seem to stop. It was like he was living out of his body, watching himself, but also him from the past.

Two shots.

Two bodies, on the floor.

Dead.

There was Aunt May and Uncle Ben next to each other, blood mixing together to create a blend of life lost and *why was he screaming still?*

He hurt. *Was it the shock?* But he had to watch his family die once more. Did he deserve this?

The scene faded, but he could still see where their bodies were. Nothing made sense, yet Peter knew what happened. The chitauri tech displayed his deep dark fear, not being able to save those he loves.

But that's the sick thing, isn't it? He *couldn't*.

The villain was quiet.

Peter stopped screaming, and seemed to float back down into his body.

And he *hurt*.

...

Air filled his weak lungs, and Peter had to close his eyes and remind himself where he was. He wasn't with May, and he wasn't with Ben. He was in the presence of a criminal, someone who needed to be taken down.

He opened his eyes, and forced himself to get up. The man had the decency to look sorry, but that didn't matter. What mattered was the ringing in Peter's ears, blocking out everything but the sound of his slow heartbeat. He clicked his web shooters to find them jammed, the corner of his suit eyes displaying that Karen was slowly rebooting.

Neither beings said anything. There was nothing to be said.

Spiderman took a step forward. Then another. And with the third, the guy snapped out of his stupor, backing up and landing against his force field. His eyes were wide with panic, muttering out "no, no, no!"

Out of nowhere he whipped out a taser, not even hesitating as he shot it.

Electricity once more fluttered through Peter's veins, sending him on his knees once more gritting his teeth. Whether it be because he somehow gained a small amount of immunity, or he was just that detached from his body, Peter realized that he didn't mind the pain. It tingled almost, like it wasn't that big of a deal despite the fact that he was basically incapacitated.

His mind never stopped conjuring thoughts of Ben and May next to each other, dead on the ground.

Distantly, he thought he could hear a high pitched whine. Where had he heard that noise before? It seemed like it was recognizable enough, because the guy turned paler than a sheet. A loud “*shit*, this is more than I bargained for!” sounded like water to Peter. He watched as the taser was turned off and dropped on the ground, force field disintegrating as if it were never there.

He ran off, leaving Peter on his knees in the dirty alley.

He couldn't move. Or, he *could*, but it felt as if his body was fighting him with every subtle motion. It was just easier to stay on the ground, breathing deeply through his nose. His senses slowly began to recuperate, the distinct whining getting closer and *why was it so loud?*

Oh, because it's Tony.

Vaguely Peter watched as Iron Man, in all his shiny Red and Gold Glory, touched down several feet in front of him. He was gesturing around, and why was he doing that? The teen blinked sluggishly, realizing that Tony was trying to talk to him.

“-it, underoos? Please, entertain me. Why have I been bombarded by FRIDAY, who has been bombarded by Karen, to check on you? Seriously, do you know how hard it is to get an AI to sound insistent? And to think, you managed to not only wrap *your* baby under your fingers, but *mine* as well? And why, in all things holy, are you *kneeling in this filth?*”

After all these months, it was in true Stark fashion that he appeared in one of the worst moments and made things... Well, worse. And of course, the man didn't know. A small, quiet part of Spidey felt overjoyed at the sight of the other superhero. Iron Man was here, and would save him!

But looking into the slightly hazy face of the metallic man in front of him, Peter wondered, save him from what?

A hand- a real, fleshy one- was waving in his face, and how long did he zone out? “Hello? Are the lights on in there? Pete, you there buddy?” Tony’s voice sounded concerned, but his face displayed anger. *At him?*

He blinked, and that was enough to inform Tony that he hadn’t fallen asleep crouched. “Kid, I can’t believe you.” He moved away, distancing himself, and unconsciously grabbed his left arm.

And the many nights that Peter hoped and imagined, fuck, the nights he spent *dreaming* that Tony would come in and check on him, see what was happening, and rescue him, all went down the drain with the one behavioral pattern.

Because in all of his wishing, Peter imagined Tony would be sympathetic. Grab all of Peter’s old belongings from the warehouse and practically force him in the car, driving the spiderling to the compound to offer him a place to stay. Hell, maybe even hug him. God only knows how attention starved Peter became. Maybe a little reprimanding for not telling him, and having him rely on Karen to fill him in, but nothing more.

He didn’t imagine Tony would explode on him.

“You’re out for fuck only *knows* how long in your suit, getting the wind knocked out of you near every day. Karen has herself stretched out thin trying to keep you in check while still informing FRIDAY of everything, and apparently every god damn thing you do is worth concern. Do you know how that looks?” He pauses, as if he was actually waiting for an answer. Knowing he wouldn’t get one, his eyes hardened even more. “Everything points to you being *irresponsible*.”

Peter at least tenses at the word as it was spit out, showing that he was still listening. But God, he wish he wasn’t. With each word, something crumbles in him. Maybe it was hope that one of his last links he had before May passed would still be okay. That Tony would come back eventually, and they would be happy again.

“Look, kid. I can’t keep doing this. Skipping school for patrol? When was the last day you even *walked* into that building, huh? Because unless you lent your suit to someone, i’d be surprised if it was sometime in the past month.” He paused, before rubbing his eyes tiredly. “God,” he said to himself, “I’m *really* living up to Howard right now.”

And with that quiet comment, it was as if something cleared in Peter's muddled brain. All traces of his previous shock were washed away, and a good timed green light shown very briefly to indicate Karen came online once more.

Tony, still oblivious to the struggle going on with the spider-kid in front of him, just barreled on. "And to see you here, barely cognizant on your knees, with a non-enhanced individual running around knowing he was the cause for Spiderman's defeat? Yeah. Not good. By the way, FRIDAY dear, go catch that lunatic." With a simple nod, the faceplate on the previously unoccupied suit flipped shut and flew off in the direction of the criminal.

At least that's one loose tie taken care of.

Peter couldn't find it in himself to defend his case. Everything Tony said was true, so what's the point? He deserved this.

Said man turned back to the red-clad vigilante, anger practically radiating off of him in waves. "Now. I had to run out of a *very important* stocks meeting to come check on your ass. The most you could do is give me something. A sentence, bare minimum." He gestured towards his chest, pursing his lips. "Right here, buddy."

And what was there to say? That, *god damn it*, Peter *tried* to do this. He tried *so hard* to get things to work. He didn't ask for his last member of his family to die. He didn't want it to be his fault. He didn't want to be forced to live on the run, spaced up in a crummy warehouse where he slowly killed himself with malnourishment.

"I didn't ask for this."

He knew it was the wrong thing to say. He knew it before those simple five words flew out of his mouth, sounding scraggly and broken. He didn't have to look at Tony's increasingly frustrated look on his face to know that he was in the wrong.

"Oh, you didn't ask for this, did you? You didn't ask to put on the suit, to constantly neglect your civilian side just to web sling all around New York? You didn't *ask* for all of this publicity? Parker, I know you're smart. What does May have to say about all of this?"

And that was it. That was the tipping factor.

Instantly Peter got off of his knees, standing on wobbly legs. Seemingly surprised, Stark schooled his expression before stepping forward to confront the teenager. He used the two inches he had on Parker to his advantage, looking down on him slightly. But it didn't matter.

Peter calmly walked past him, shot a web, and took off leaving a very confused Tony standing in an alleyway.

"For Christ's sake," he muttered, rubbing his face with both of his hands. "FRIDAY, babe, hurry with that suit. Daddy needs to go home and rethink some things."

_____.Tony's Cameo_____

It wasn't like Tony was *intentionally* ignoring FRIDAY.

"Boss, Karen is requesting assistance once more with Mr. Parker. It seems he is using his suit to travel to school."

Tony looked up from the piles of papers in front of him, hefting out a sigh. All morning Pepper had him catching up on his work that he was neglecting, meaning a shit ton of paperwork that needed to be scanned and signed. "Yeah, and what about it?" He snapped towards his AI. "If the kid wants to get caught swinging to the doorstep of his school, then let him be."

He felt a twinge of guilt towards FRIDAY, but thankfully she gave no signs of hard feelings towards his small outburst. "Understood, informing her now."

Wishing for what felt like the fifth time this hour, Tony wishes Pepper didn't take away the coffee machine in an act to get him to be productive.

It was later that day that FRIDAY informed him that Peter was out of school and in his suit.

"Jesus, girl. What's with this new teenage rebellion?" He wondered out loud, fiddling with a screwdriver. The AI responded "it seems he's going to his house. Shall I ask Karen to keep us

updated?”

Tony looked down at the broken Iron Man mask in front of him, contemplating. Him and the kid weren't by all means *close*, but Tony still felt obligated to watch out for him. Peter has yet to be classified as an adult, for Christ's sake. But the young spiderling had the moral backbone unlike anyone else, along with a sense of maturity that Tony barely got to see in his hectic life. It was always refreshing when they hung out together, yet that's exactly what they haven't been doing.

Between Stark Industries, Iron Man, being an Avenger, as well as trying to find the time of day to sit down and have a few seconds to himself, Tony had been neglecting one of his only friends that wasn't caught up in the same loop as him.

It'd been a few months since they saw each other outside of their double lives, but that time probably would've been enough for Peter to find someone else to fill in the space that Tony temporarily occupied. And as much as he hates to admit it, it would probably be for the better. He could see with each smile from the teen that he was slowly worming his way into Peter's heart, replacing the position his father and uncle once filled.

And there was no way that Tony was equipped to deal with the emotional response that may have triggered.

Shaking himself out of his dark thoughts, he turned the screwdriver over and began working on the faceplate once more, muttering a quiet “yeah, go ahead” and trying to ignore the small twinge in his chest that stabbed whenever he thought about Peter no longer wanting to be close to him.

“Boss, it seems Peter has passed out. Would you like me to send you his coordinates?”

Don't check. Don't get attached.

“No FRI, he's a big boy. He can get through it.”

“Boss, Karen has informed me that Peter’s abilities are dwindling, which are affecting his fighting capability. Shall I send a suit to his location?”

He’ll come to you if he needs help.

“Not this time, girl. You said his abilities aren’t working properly?” Tony thought about the legitimacy of such, wondering how something genetic just... Stopped. “After my 2:00 meeting, remind me to jump in the lab and pull up some of Peter’s biology, would ya’?”

“Very well, sir.”

When Tony first told FRIDAY to alert him of whatever Karen was telling her, he didn’t think that it’d be to the point of her waking him up at ungodly hours because Peter managed to hurt himself in his suit.

He’d gotten reports constantly about Peter not being in school, not going home, facing villains that were far above and far below his skill range. It got to the point that he told FRIDAY to mute the calls about him not being somewhere. It seemed like that rebellious stage wasn’t just a phase.

“Boss, Karen-”

Tony slammed his hand on the desk, concentration broken. He squeezed his eyes shut and let out a shaky breath, trying to regain his composure. “FRIDAY, sweetie, this has been going on for months. Unless Peter is dead or doing something dangerously illegal, I don’t want to hear it.”

The quiet in his office was deafening, his words ringing through his head. Finally, FRIDAY responded “I’ll stop alerting you of Karen’s messages, but i’ll keep them in my data banks so you can go back and listen to them later.”

That made Tony pause, cocking his head. Why would he want to listen to Karen’s messages? He knew what they mainly consisted of, so if he ever wanted to go back he could just think about one of the many times FRIDAY relayed a message.

Nonetheless, he didn't complain. Not hearing how Peter was doing would be for the best. The kid (though, he's not really a kid anymore, is he?) wouldn't be appreciative of getting spied on, despite that Tony never actually tracked his location. Even though there were times he really, *really*, wanted to.

He won't be appreciative, because he'll never even see you-

Tony stopped that train long before it left the station, standing on numb legs and walking towards the door to his office. "Boss," FRIDAY inquired. "Miss Potts requested that you stay in this room until you finish working, or until your next meeting which would be at 9." He rolled his eyes at the reminder, reaching for the door handle. "Tell Miss Potts that unless she wants my reports to be half assed and nowhere near acceptable, I need to take a break. Do something. Anything."

He already walked away, heading towards the elevator, when he heard "She said that a break won't help your inability to write for longer than twenty minutes. Also, to get her lunch because she's starving and thinks it's useless to make a trip down when you're already heading there."

"Boss," FRIDAY's voice cut through the meeting room, cutting off the grouchy board director. Silently Tony cheered even as all twelve pairs of eyes turned his way. "What is it, darling? I'm a little busy, so this'd better be important."

Truth is, he only said that for appearances. Even if FRIDAY told him an employee got hit with a bagel, he'd bail just to go watch the footage. He flashed his audience his classic Stark grin, earning a squint from Pepper across the room.

"Remember when you told me not to alert you unless Spiderman is dying, or doing something insanely illegal?"

At the words, his smile dropped. *That*, he thought, *was sure as hell what I was expecting.*

"FRI," he started, voice hard. "Please tell me it's the latter. I can handle a little bit of illegalcy."

The room was quiet, everyone unsure of what to say to the interruption. Tony's back was rigid,

anxiety seeming to course through his every nerve. God, if Peter was dead...

“Karen says he’s not dead, but if he endures the electrical current that’s coursing through his body any longer, then there’s a large chance that that’ll change.”

Before she could finish Tony was pushing out of his chair, calling out for his armor. He ignored the complaints he was getting from the people in the meeting. They could all fuck themselves for all he cared.

“FRI, give me his location. It’s time we had a one-on-one with Spiderman.”

Chapter End Notes

The last bit shows Tony and why he hasn’t checked on Peter for months. He’s a busy, insecure lil man :,)

The Breath Of Your Promised Memories

Chapter Summary

Peter was a masked idiot; his blood was made for catastrophe.

For Tony, it was simple. Most misery was masked as happiness.

Matt knew that however much the kid kicked and screamed, he would be the only one there to hear him.

Karen knew that her beliefs influence her actions. Maybe that's why she'd grown attached.

Foggy had a force in his head, a deal in his mind. He was a lawyer through and through. He knew this would work.

Chapter Notes

First of all, I'd like to thank my two wonderful friends and betas for helping me write this! They were an absolute help, and gave me ideas implemented in the chapter that i'm sure you guys will enjoy :)

Second, oh my gosh?? The amount of support?? It's staggering. You guys are amazing. Thank you so much for every kudos, every comment, and every bookmark. You're amazing <3

Third, I hope you enjoy! This one is a long one!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was around 2 AM when Peter swung back to Matt's apartment.

Upon entering through the door that lead to the roof, Peter found that it was one of those rare nights when Daredevil wasn't found prowling around the streets, and rather found laying in bed, sound asleep.

The sight of the sleeping man broke Peter out of his numb state that he'd been in ever since Tony.

Tony.

Just thinking of the man and how much disappointment filled his gaze made Peter want to curl up and die. The one look he hoped he'd never have to see directed at him, now in shocking vividness. It was worse than anything his nightmares could conjure up, because now he had a memory to attach to it. It wasn't something his mind could just imagine.

Peter took off his mask slowly, eyes burning.

On his way back, he'd been running Tony's rant through his brain. It was the only thing he could think about. At one point, Karen spoke up to ask if he was alright. "Y'know Karen?" he started, propelling himself into the sky. "I don't really think I am."

When she responded, she sounded subdued. "I'm sorry, Peter. If you want, I can alert FRIDAY and she'll reroute--"

"Karen, how long have you been messaging Stark about me? I thought you said you wouldn't." Even he couldn't keep the hurt out of his voice. It had been months, *months*, that he thought he was safe from scrutiny from his AI. "...I never said that I wouldn't, Peter. That goes against my protocols. I'm sorry." She almost hesitated, as if that was possible for an AI. "I have only alerted FRIDAY, and she has stopped alerting Mr. Stark, unless you are 'dead or doing something dangerously illegal', in his own words."

Peter scoffed and rolled his eyes at that, trying not to think about how much those simple words hurt. "Yeah, because he only cares when there's another death on his hands."

Sure, maybe the comment was extra, but Peter was angry. Angry at himself, angry at Karen, angry at Stark.

Angry at himself for thinking that, at one glance, Tony would want to help him. He'd see a struggling teen who had just lost his family and was living on the streets, and pick him up. He's mad because he actually envisioned a time when the older man would consider him a part of his family, someone he grew to appreciate. Irritated because he got his hopes up, just because of a few lab days they'd had months before.

He was angry at Karen for lying to him. Or rather, lying by omission of information. She didn't tell him that she was relaying information, crucial details that he had no idea the extent of. Did she tell FRIDAY about the countless nights spent screaming himself awake from a nightmare? The amount of money he had to take out of his dwindling savings just for suit repairs? The slow process of his powers?

And lastly, he was angry at Tony. How could the man push him away for months on end, and then show up out of nowhere and blame *Peter* for everything? There was no way that Tony knew about everything going on, otherwise he wouldn't of been so harsh. *Or maybe he did know, he just didn't care*, his mind whispered. But if he didn't know, that means he never listened to FRIDAY's relayed messages in the first place, which further upset him. Was he really that insignificant to him?

He shot out another web and ricochet off of a nearby apartment.

"Karen, stop sending in reports. I don't care what protocols there are, I'll override them."

And maybe he wasn't acting rationally. But his heartbeat was skyrocketing, his limbs still had small tremors from the previous electrical shocking he received earlier, and his mind wouldn't, *couldn't*, stop.

Thankfully, the AI didn't protest. "Of course, Peter. Initiating protocol Teen Rebel."

And just like that, the anger was washed away with another emotion. Grief.

Tony had made a specialized protocol for him. Sure, all the protocols were essentially made for him, but this one was *made for him*. Tony had taken time out of his probably busy day to sit down and think about Peter not liking something, and made a way for him to change it if he pleased.

And for some reason, that thought alone had Peter misty eyed.

"Thank you, Karen."

Ever since then, the AI had remained dutifully quiet. She didn't alert him of any possible crimes on his way back, and didn't even say goodbye as he took the mask off.

Matt's apartment was a mix of greys and blacks, the billboard in front of his large windows down for repairs. Without focusing, the sounds of car horns honking sounded miles away. If it were raining, he may have cracked a smile at the movie-esque feel. Everything was quiet and peaceful. In an odd way, it perfectly matched Peter's disheveled mood.

There were clothes set out for him on the couch, and Peter almost burst into tears right then and there.

As silent as he could, he pushed the spider insignia in the middle of his suit, goosebumps instantly forming on his exposed skin. He quickly changed materials, thanking whatever deity that was watching that Matt had spare t-shirts and pyjama bottoms that fit him.

Then again, what kind of sick deity would be giving him clothes, instead of the ability to save Aunt May, and the courage to live after the consequences?

Peter was still acting like a zombie, just going through the motions. Not really feeling anything, but at the same time feeling too much. He wasn't aware of what he was doing until he was doing it.

His feet padded against the wood floor as he made his way to Matt's bedroom, only stopping when he saw the man sleeping peacefully. The sound of his slow heartbeat and calm breaths brought a sense of tranquility over him, some tension leaking out of his shoulders at the sound.

Letting Matt's bodily sounds wash back down to almost nothing, Peter sighed. He didn't want to wake the man. He probably had to be in court tomorrow, or something big to make him skip a night of vigilante business. It wouldn't be fair if he got woken up because the teen couldn't get his emotions in check. He'll just have to apologize tomorrow.

The teen sniffled and went to turn to lay down on the couch for the night when the sheets ruffled a bit, the deep low voice of Matt breaking the silence. "Peter?" He turned in the direction of the door, probably sensing the unease of the boy. Or, probably tasting the salt from his tears in the air.

With the simple word, it was as if a floodgate had been opened.

Tears now flew freely from his brown eyes, embarrassment turning his face red. "God, Matt. I'm-I'm so sorry. F-for everything." He rubbed at his eyes, trying to will the build-up of emotions to cease.

Matt, upon realizing that something had to have happened while Peter was gone, quickly wiped the sleep out of his eyes. "What's wrong?" he asked, propping himself on his elbows, silk sheets rippling off of his scarred chest. Distress rolled off of the kid in waves, tugging at something in Matt's chest.

Peter didn't know how to start. How can you tell someone that you're just a fucked up, absolute *wreck* of a human being? That no matter what you do, trouble and despair seem to be waiting at every corner. That he can't even keep his friends around, let alone his *family*.

And why was he *still* crying?

Luckily for him, the older man seemed to catch onto his hesitation. He shuffled himself to give room on the bed, lifting the covers up and expelling some of the heat in offerance. Peter gratefully slinked across the small space, jumping in the bed and scooting towards Matt. And in those few seconds, something had to have possessed him and changed a small part of him, struck a cord that wasn't previously vibrating in motion. Something had to have clicked, or shriveled and died, because the next thing Peter did was align with Matt's side, head landing on his shoulder and arm draped around his chest.

Matt, to his credit, only stiffened a little bit. But as he felt Peter's forehead wrinkle, a sad little sob wrack through his small body, Matt knew that he needed to do something else to help the grieving boy. He started to shift, lifting his arm to encase Peter and bring him closer, letting his head land across his chest and successfully wrapping the small kid in warmth.

And maybe it was the reassurance. Maybe it was the fact that he'd only been in this position a few times with his aunt, right after uncle Ben died. Or because this was the most amount of attention he'd gotten in months, and his attention starved body and mind couldn't take it.

But Peter sobbed into Matt's chest, and told him everything.

From the death of his parents as a hopeful child, to holding his uncle while he took his last breaths. From the inception of Spiderman, propelled by that pain, to his aunt dying in front of him while he stood by, uselessly paralyzed by that very memory. From losing all of his friends, to losing his home and having to 'rent' a musty old warehouse. To the hard nights where he couldn't eat because he didn't have the money, and how he couldn't sleep because night terrors kept his eyes bloodshot and weary of every shadow that lurked. From Tony becoming a semblance of a father figure in his eyes, to him viciously ripping that naïve rug right from under him and sending him sprawling on the pavement, unable to pick himself up. He told Matt things that he never told Tony, told him about how he felt during those horrible moments in his life and how awfully painful it was to pick himself up only to get knocked down once more.

Peter let everything go, and felt heavier and lighter at the same time.

And Matt listened. He wasn't just hearing the boy cradled into his arms, he was *listening*. Every voice crack that came from the end of puberty and unadulterated pain. Every hiccup, parts where he was sure Peter would stop, but he barreled on. Every heart stutter, every shiver.

Matt listened, and he felt absolutely broken for the boy who carried the weight of the world on his frail shoulders.

Eventually, the whimpers died off, and Peter was left with a heavy ache behind his eyes. Suddenly, the reality of what he'd just done hit him, and he realized that everything was out there. All of his traumatic experiences, floating in the tiny room and filling Matt's head.

And yet, he couldn't bring himself to feel anything other than relieved.

Things he'd never told anyone were now no longer weighing down on his conscious, trapping him and making everything seem darker and less fulfilling than it actually was. Someone was finally there for him in the ways he thought Tony would be.

Peter held onto Matt tighter, and Matt did the same.

For the first time since the teen joined him on the bed, Matt spoke. "I promise you, Peter. You won't have to go through this alone anymore." He hesitated, before planting a gentle kiss in his curly hair. "I'll help you whenever, with whatever, you need."

With that finality, Peter finally closed his eyes and let the heaviness take over with a small smile on his chapped lips.

Matt listened as his breathing and heartbeat slowed down, waiting for him to slip into unconsciousness. With the knowledge that the kid was no longer awake, Matt sighed and got comfortable, willing himself to go back to sleep.

And in the silence that followed, Matt made a promise that fell on deaf ears. A promise to make things better, get things to change.

He was going to help Peter get his life back.

“I promise.”

.....

Tony was confused.

He waited in the alley for his suit, looking in the direction Peter last swung to. FRIDAY was still out, bringing the criminal to the nearest police station. Rubbing his hands together and scanning the area with inquisitive eyes, he tried to make sense of what had happened.

Obviously, he was missing something. But what? What could've possibly happened to make a low grade criminal with high grade weapons almost kill Petey? And what in the hell changed between the two of them? Peter used to bounce everywhere, spewing sentences faster than Tony could keep up with, and now he just swings away without a backwards glance.

Putting a hand on the disgusting brick wall, Tony presumed he deserved that one.

Months with radio silence, and he shows up screaming and hollering at the kid? *God, what a Howard move.* Tony at least had enough common sense to know that he fucked up. Something with seeing Peter kneeling on the ground just.. Set him off. It was like, all of those months were spent for *nothing*. Like Tony hadn't tried his damndest to get himself away from the kid so he couldn't taint him. Couldn't let his oily blood stained hands touch Peter's clean and pure ones.

And, maybe they really were for nothing.

It wasn't a thought that he wanted to entertain, but in the relative quiet of the alley, dark shadows floating over everything under the presence of the moon, it wasn't something Tony could ignore.

What if he read everything wrong? Had he been looking out for Pete, or had he really been looking out for himself? He saw that the young boy wanted a father figure, and he chickened out. Saw himself turning into Howard, *breaking* a promise he made to himself all those years ago, and took the cowards way out?

What if, Tony, in all of his realist views, avoided the cold hard truth?

“God,” he muttered to the darkness. “When I left that meeting, I sure as hell wasn’t expecting a teenage existential crisis.”

FRIDAY came back around ten minutes later, news that the criminal had been successfully taken care of along with the chitauri weapon.

“That’s great, baby girl.” Tony started, climbing into the opened suit. “But what did it do? Reverse gravity, make it rain chimichangas?” He made a show of looking around, clicking his tongue disapprovingly at the lack of food at the same time the faceplate came down to shield his face.

“It seemed as if it created a forcefield, sir. It would explain the leftover energy radiating from the area we’re currently occupying.” FRIDAY relayed, lighting the screen up at the end of her sentence to show the traces left around the dirty walls. Tony squinted his eyes, feeling as if there was still a piece of the puzzle he was missing.

A force field didn’t explain Peter’s fleeting behavior. “Don’t tell me that’s it. If it is, find a way to reword it or else i’ll end up throwing... That plastic bag on the floor, or something. Have an angry outburst.” His AI ignored his temporary child recession, continuing on with her report. “There was an external remote that controlled part of the machine, boss. It would send shockwaves through the last person to enter the forcefield, connecting through their hippocampus, amygdala, cingulate gyrus, thalamus, hypothalamus, and epithalamus.”

It took Tony a few seconds of remembrance, but then he connected the dots. “So... It essentially connected with their memory? And what, made them see things they didn’t want to?” He thought about it a little bit more, walking around the area looking at the heavier traces of energy. “My guess is that it brought up their most traumatic experiences and blended them together. And judging from the surrounding area, the Chitauri tech most likely aired the image being projected to stimulate the environment and trick the victim into thinking they’re reliving the event once more.”

At that, Tony felt like a weight crushed down on his chest.

Peter.

Everything finally clicked into place. That missing puzzle piece was found, and it completed a

picture Tony wished he couldn't see.

For a few horrible seconds, he was thrust back into memories of late nights on top of buildings, masks completely off both of their faces as Peter sulked over something. Tony, unsure of how to help, just sat quietly next to him and hoped his presence was enough. A few times, Peter would tell him why he was upset. Something about stopping a mugging, but bringing horrid flashbacks that he didn't want to live in. Those few times, they left Peter open. Open for the world to see, yet Tony was the only one witnessing any of it.

The insane amount of trust crippled him on the spot, and those few short times that it'd happened, all Tony did was pat his back and give a lousy side hug. And always, Peter would take a deep breath and wipe his face, all traces of sadness gone. Instead, being replaced with a bone-deep look of tiredness, a look that no teenager should have. He would get up, tell Tony "thank you" despite him not doing anything, and grab his mask and leave.

From those few times, Tony could gather that Peter had a hard upbringing. Hell, the fact that he never talked about any of his family except his aunt told him that something was up. And Peter expected Tony to trust him, so he never looked up extra information about the teen and his family, despite desperately wanting to know more about how he came to be who he was today.

It wasn't until one night where they were both down in the lab, unable to sleep, that Peter finally slipped. Let out that his parents died when he was a child. He meant it to be an off-handed comment, but the sheer weight of the proclamation had Tony putting down his tools, swivelling to face him. "I'm sorry, backtracking, but what?" He asked incredulously, watching the shrug that flowed through Peter's shoulders.

"Yeah," he had said, "they died when I was little. Left me with my aunt and uncle. All I knew was that they were leaving for business. When it had been a few months and they hadn't returned, I developed a fear of jobs because I didn't want to get taken away like they did. Stupid, right?" He finished his story with a self-deprecating laugh, doing everything he could've to avoid Tony's line of sight.

"No, not stupid. Not stupid at all." Tony quickly stated. Now that he seemed to have unlocked this new bit of information, he wanted more. "And what about your aunt and uncle? What did they do?"

Peter had taken a glance at the clock, squinting at the bright red lights that flashed 3:23 AM. "Well, they did what they could, y'know? Took me in, raised me like their son. Tried to keep my childhood as happy as they could, and they mostly succeeded." He gained a far away look in his eyes, lips twitched up at whatever memory just came to mind. "My uncle, his name was Ben. Greatest man known to walk the Earth, or at least that's what I thought when I was growing up. He

tried to do everything in his power to make sure that there was always a smile on my face, which really helped when I got old enough to realize what actually happened with my parents.”

And suddenly that smile was gone, replaced with the kind of look you reserve when you’re by yourself, sitting in a dark room at an ungodly hour, thoughts racing with no signs of stopping. “I cried a lot, naturally.” He scoffed, waving his hand in the air dismissively while rolling his eyes. “And he would always be there, by my side, asking ‘are you happy?’ And as a child I didn’t get it, because *no* I wasn’t happy, I was *crying*. For the longest time, I thought that he was just really bad at advice. Didn’t have the heart to tell him, so I’d go along with him every time.”

By that point, Peter had stopped messing around with whatever he was working on, instead choosing to wring his hands together. He was slumped over, similar to Tony’s position. The older man was leaning in his chair, arms resting on the sides. Already, he could tell where this was going with the past tense. But he didn’t interrupt the kid, thinking that it probably felt like it was therapeutic to think of his relatives. That was the most he’s ever talked about his family, and Tony hated to say that he was happy that he’s finally learning about Peter’s origins.

“It wasn’t until one day, I can’t even tell you what brought this on, but I realized what he meant. He wasn’t asking if I was happy in the moment, he was asking if I was happy overall. And with that realization, came the epiphany that *yes, I am* happy. My outbursts over little things didn’t affect my life in the grand scheme of things-- just those few moments. They didn’t contribute to my overall happiness, just my momentary happiness.”

“And that day, I got *so* happy. I wanted to tell Ben that yeah, *finally* after all these years, I am happy. So I rushed home from school that day, completed all of my work as soon as possible, and told aunt May that I was gonna run and meet Ben on his way home from work. Have a one-on-one, man-to-man. How silly.” Peter had laughed, sniffling. He brought a hand and wiped his dampening eyes, coughing and grunting to cover up his sadness.

Tony had felt like he was... Intruding. Despite it being a two person conversation, the spotlight wasn’t on him. It was on the disheveled boy in front of him, who just needed someone to listen to him.

“I feel like Ben would’ve liked you, y’know? He always looked up to you, but if you two were to meet today I feel like you’d get along like two peas in a pod. You’re like him, in a weird sense” Peter unconsciously (or probably consciously, needing a few seconds to relive the memory associated) rerouted, dodging the end of the inevitable. Tony took that time to cut in, speaking slowly and quietly so the mood wasn’t destroyed. “Kid, what happened next?”

Peter's eyes had widened as if genuinely shocked that he was actually paying attention to his story, before timidly averting his gaze. “Well, long story short, Ben... Ran into some trouble, I guess. Or

rather, I did. There was a robber, fresh out of the corner store. I happened to turn the corner and got in his way as he was trying to run, stopping him in his path. And I could've done something, y'know? I just got my powers, and was acquainted with them well enough to understand how to use them."

"But in those moments, seeing that gun pointed at me? I froze. Everything stopped, my spidey sense screaming but nothing happening. Because, holy shit that was a *gun*, and I had never seen one up close before, and then he was shooting and I couldn't see. And I was thinking that this was the end, but then I realized that with those loud shots, there was no pain. And to my horror, I looked forward and saw that the reason I couldn't see... Was because someone was standing in front of me. *Ben*, was standing in front of me."

Something in Tony's chest had wilted as he watched Peter openly cry now, pushing the sleeves of his hoodie to cover his fingers and wrapping his arms around his stomach. He looked so small like that, and it truly hit Tony just how much this kid had gone through.

But Peter wasn't finished with the memory. "He, uh, was walking on the other side of the street. Saw what was happening, and rushed to the rescue. Like a goddamn superhero." He paused, a broken smile on his face. "...I held him as he bled out. I knew that there wasn't any saving him, but nothing stopped me from reassuring him in his last moments that there would be help. I held his hand and heard the exact moment his heart stopped beating. I, uh, never got the chance to tell him that I was happy."

And just like that, Tony had understood. He knew where Peter got his views on being a superhero. Always 'looking out for the little guy.' Because that's exactly what his uncle had done, and that's exactly why he was gone. He understood why Peter went out every day or night and did the things he did. Hell, he even realized *why* it was such a big thing for the spiderling to tune into people's natural sounds and listen to the beating of their hearts.

He had gotten up and wordlessly hugged Peter, smiling at the speed in which the younger boy had when hugging him back.

Those memories that he made with Peter, Tony held close to his heart because he thought that there wouldn't be any more. But knowing what he knows now, all he can think about is how much of a colossal fuckup he's made.

"FRI, connect to Karen. Find out where Peter is."

He turned his palms down, repulsors powering on and sending him into the air. Hopefully, it was late enough to where nobody was paying attention to Iron Man flying out of an alley that Spiderman had just swung out of.

As soon as he knew where that rascal was, Tony was gonna hug him. He was going to apologize for being absent, for only thinking about himself, and for taking so long to finally realize how much he meant to the man made of iron. God, he'd take him out for ice cream and let him get whatever- but also Peter was older, damnit, he'd want to do something else fun. A smile lit up Tony's face as he imagined the pure confusion and joy on the kids face, when he swooped in like he-

"Boss, Karen has ended all connections between us. I am unable to track Peter, and it seems that he's the one who enabled protocol Teen Rebel."

And just like that, the Man of Iron was able to be bent, morphing under the sheer amount of shock and pain. If FRIDAY hadn't picked up on his rapidly increasing heart rate and taken control of the suit, he's sure that he would've crashed into a building. "He- he what?" Tony spluttered unbelievably. Had he really upset Peter that much?

"Mr. Parker found out about Karen's constant message relays, and requested she severed the connection. The most she can do is give us the location Peter had been at most frequently, as according to the guidelines of the protocol." FRIDAY relayed with a twinge of what sounded like remorse.

Leave it to his own fucking creation to turn on him. Leave him as well, become 98.5% loyal to Peter. And Tony couldn't even find it in himself to be mad at anyone other than himself. Peter couldn't help the aura that surrounded him, silently enticing everyone, and apparently every *thing*. Of course the sentient AI fell for it as hard as he had. Because it would only make sense that his robots left him, just like everyone else in his life has.

Suddenly, the coldness of the Iron Man suit cutting through the air felt like too much. "FRI-" Tony heaved out, watching as his screen bleeped in warning of his quickly raising vitals. "I need- get me down. I need *out*." he stressed, shaking his head. Instantly he plummeted, landing safely on a random building top. The tower can be seen in the distance.

The front of the suit opens and Tony all but tumbles out, clutching his chest where his arc reactor used to be. He only makes it a few feet before fumbling around like a newborn deer. Thankfully, there was an AC unit to catch him when he started to fall, making sure he wouldn't plummet on his ass. FRI closed the suit behind him, having it walk and be in Tony's peripheral.

The chilly wind helped ground him and remind him where he was, helpfully supplying that it wouldn't look good if someone caught him having a panic attack on a roof of a building.

Leave it to him to fuck things up, get elated at the prospect of coming back like nothing happened, only to get reality handed to him in the form of a blocking. For someone with brains unlike any other, he sure felt as dumb as a bag of rocks. Of course Peter wouldn't want to be near him after all the shit he's pulled.

"Boss," FRIDAY cut through his thoughts, "would you like me to contact Ms. Potts?" Tony slammed his eyes shut, willing himself to take large breaths. Instead of giving a verbal answer, he just raised a trembling hand and waved towards the suit once, shaking his head side to side. He wouldn't wake her up in the middle of the night to deal with his anxiety riddled ass.

He wouldn't.

Just like he wouldn't throw himself into the pit of despair he frequented back in the old days.

"Come on, Iron Man." He muttered to himself, shoving his thumbs over his eyes. "You're an engineer. You *fix* things." Tony told himself as inspiration, looking towards the sky for guidance. *But*, he thought, *how do you fix a relationship with a person?*

Because Peter wasn't like any of his gadgets or gizmos. He wasn't like Pepper, and he wasn't like Steve. He couldn't just put a metaphorical bandaid on this and call it quits like he's done before. Tony hadn't yelled at anyone like he had the teen, not in the same regards.

"Boss," FRIDAY interrupted his train of thought-- which he wasn't complaining about, "may I construct a method of going about things?" The suit turned to face Tony, almost as if there was another person inside.

"*Method*. Method of going about things" He parroted, mind simultaneously shutting down and rebooting at the same time. Method of going about things equals a plan, a plan equals an endgame, a *solution*. "Yes, boss," FRIDAY answered dutifully.

Tony cleared his throat before waving his hand in her direction, the universal sign for 'go on.' The Iron Man suit came to crouch in front of him, glowing eyes causing him to look down at the arc reactor in the middle of the suit. "I advise that you allow me to take you back to the tower where you can properly take care of yourself. And then tomorrow, go through Karen's logs she's left me

about Peter. That way you can have an adequate description of what's been going on with him, at least while he was in the suit." She paused a bit, letting the genius digest the information. "Is that alright, boss?"

And God bless his AI for anything and everything she's done for Tony, because he'd sure as hell be lost without her. He shook his head, a tired smile gracing his face. "Yeah, yeah that sounds wonderful babygirl." The billionaire brought his hand up to the chestplate, knuckles rapping against the metal. "Open up, would you? Nothing sounds better than a hot shower and inevitable sleep, surprisingly."

The suit backed up to create more space between the two before opening, allowing Tony to stand up and climb into the suit, a sigh escaping his lips as it closed again and he was greeted by flashing images being projected across the screen.

Traces of his almost-anxiety-attack still flowed through Tony's veins, leaving a heaviness behind his eyes and a weight to his movements. Thankfully, FRIDAY initiated autopilot and guided him safely back to the tower, where there would no doubt be more self-evaluations that span in the course of about five minutes but re-evaluate a section of his life for the next thirty years, give or take a few.

Because Tony needed to think about how he treated Peter in the past, and learn how to grow from that.

Because he'll be better than Howard ever was.

He will. For Peter's sake.

—...—...—...—...—...—...—

When Peter wakes up the next morning, he feels... odd.

The surface he's sleeping on isn't rough like the couch, in fact, it isn't rough at all. It's like he's on a cloud. There's the smell of eggs and bacon wafting through the air, Matt humming breaking through the soft sounds of Hell's Kitchen outside.

Matt.

Almost like a trigger word, memories of the previous night zoom through his brain, reminding him of how he cried like a toddler *all* over the man. Peter slammed his eyes open, shooting up out of the bed. Vertigo turned his eyesight into a pile of soup, spinning while he groaned. Matt, upon knowing the teen was finally up (although he probably knew long before Peter even registered *himself* was awake), called out “Morning, Peter! I went out and got breakfast, egg tacos!”

Matt wanted to cringe at the oddly domestic feel that washed through him at the proclamation. It wasn’t a thing that usually struck him, so every time that it did, it left a weird taste in his mouth. The blind man unconsciously squeezed at the tin foil that wrapped around his taco, sighing. What was this kid doing to him?

Kicking off the (insanely) soft blankets off of his warm body, Peter scrubbed his eyes and face for and crustiness left from sleep or dried up tears. The smell that was emitting from the kitchen made his over-excited stomach start to grumble, a childlike curse following right after. Hopefully the snicker that came from the kitchen wasn’t because of that.

His legs felt like lead as they slumped over the side of the mattress and landed on the floor. Every molecule of Peter’s being was begging him to just slip back into the comfort of the warm silk sheets, *that was the best sleep you’ve had in months*, but he forced himself up. If not for himself, or the egg tacos, then for Matt.

“Matt, I don’t-” he coughed to clear out his morning voice, padding slowly towards the kitchen. “-I don’t know how to say i’m sorry and thank you at the same time... But, y’know..” Peter scratched the back of his head, trailing off. Thankfully Matt showed him some mercy and gave a tight lipped smile and a nod, ending the encounter before it really started.

The two fell in sync for the remainder of the morning, each taking their time to eat their food and share stories that the other reminded them of. It was like they’d been doing this for years; the comfort that Peter found in Matt was baffling. He’d only known the man for a short amount of time, yet he still managed to save his life, from death and an aimless existence, spent wandering the streets of New York as just another face in the crowd.

Eventually, Matt got up and took their trash and threw it away, asking Peter to shower and get ready, they’ll be visiting his workspace. Hollering back that he’d hog all the hot water before Matt had a chance to get himself decent, the teen rushed to do what was asked of him.

Peter stripped out of his clothing- or rather, Matt's old clothing that was too small for him to fit in anymore,- and turned the water on to lukewarm, his enhanced senses taking a collective sigh of relief. For the first time in a long time, there was a huge sense of belonging. Like he was meant to be here, in this moment, stepping in this specific shower and feeling this specific way. Almost as if he was destined to meet Matt and end up staying at his place.

Like the universe wanted him on this new path of life.

Grabbing the sunflower scented shampoo (really, Matt? This *had* to be some kind of inside joke he had with someone), Peter came to the realization that none of this would've happened if May hadn't passed. And with that mountain of a revelation came the side fact, that it didn't hurt anymore. Her death didn't plague his thoughts, incorporating itself in all of his movements. He didn't feel that bone deep sadness anymore, only a sense of contentment.

May had died, and Peter was fine.

He was *fine*. Nothing bad was happening that's life threatening, he's getting emancipated to gain his life back. Tony was... Still in Stark fashion, but that wasn't harming anyone.

He thought that those wounds wouldn't heal, but he proved himself wrong.

Peter moved on, and he was happy.

Walking down the street with Matt garnered some looks that Peter was only used to getting while he donned his spider suit. But he seemed unperturbed, so naturally the young teen felt the need to reciprocate. It also probably didn't help that they were both in business suits.

"You're not wearing that," Matt casually stated, as if he could actually see Peter's long sleeved hoodie and baggy joggers.

"And what would you suggest? That I go out and buy a shirt in a fancy color?" He retorted, crossing his arms and cocking his hip sassily. Matt must've been able to make out a picture of his

stance, because he quirked an eyebrow and let out a huff of a laugh.

“No, I suppose you can’t do that. I’m sure there’s something in my closet that fits you, however. Come on, let’s look.”

The suit that ended up fitting better than the rest was undeniably *the* softest thing Peter has ever worn. Taking a wild guess, he assumed it had something to do with Matt’s heightened senses not liking the general scratchiness that came with cotton material.

And when Matt said he was a lawyer, Peter sure as hell didn’t expect him to mean a lawyer at his own firm. He pinpointed Matty as someone to work in a sophisticated building filled with floors and floors of other people in the same practice. So when they took a right on the street and the cane clonked against the stairway to the building, Peter was confused for all of two seconds.

Matt turned to him, adjusting his red glasses on his face. “Now, there’s going to be two people there, who both know that I took in Spiderman when he was injured. Don’t worry-” he used one hand to stop Peter (as if he would walk inside while getting the rundown of things) before continuing to make his cane smaller, “-they both know about my other profession. Foggy is pretty smart, but at certain things he’s pretty dumb, so I’m giving it a day or two before he connects the dots between you and the other guy. Karen, however, is a mystery. I’m not sure how long it’ll take her. Just... Don’t be surprised if they say things about your age. God knows that I got a lot of shit when they found out about me.”

Peter nodded along with the explanation, clapping his hands together at the end. “Great, cool. So they’ll possibly be too freaked out about my age to register the fact that I’m gonna be intruding on their office space until further notice?” Matt chuckled, before adding “yeah, I guess when you put it that way.”

A smile lit up his face as someone pushed past them, not really looking where she was going. “Well then, let’s go get introduced!” Peter held out his elbow for Matt, ready to put in the appearance that he’s just helping a blind man. And of course, Matt follows in his lead.

“Lets.”

Foggy, strangely enough, looked like a Foggy. Peter didn't know how to place it, but there was no other name that he would've pinned him for. Naturally, he knew it was a nickname and he was curious as to the origin story of said name, but something in him told him not to ask. Maybe it'll ruin the magic that accompanies such a weird title.

And Karen, oddly, reminds him of someone. The figure and name alluded him in the moment, but his mind immediately screamed that she was okay, she was safe. No danger. And in the few short seconds from when he entered the building with Matt, he already picked up on her mannerism of tucking her hair behind her ears. In fact, before she even noticed him, Peter already concluded that she wasn't always into law, and certainly wasn't into it as much as the duo. Her hands were always moving, fidgeting with energy that didn't follow through with the rest of her body. They hadn't stopped, even when she did.

Matt cleared his throat and garnered the attention of the two, who both flashed between looking confused and delighted at the presence of the teen.

Whereas the blonde came forward, arm extended in the hopes of a handshake, Foggy held back. "And who might you be?" Karen asked delightfully, blinding smile reaching her eyes. Peter did his best to reciprocate as Matt moved around them, making his way to his colleague. "Hi, I'm Peter! Peter Parker." If she was offset by how jovial he sounded, she didn't comment.

His eyes slowly went from meeting hers, to sliding across the room. Matt and Foggy were speaking without saying anything, gauging each others body movements in a way that only close friends could do. Eventually, the two headed for Matt's office and closed the door, speaking in hushed whispers. If Peter wanted to, he could eavesdrop on their conversation. Karen must've followed his line of sight, because she let out a disappointed sigh before addressing him once more.

"Don't mind them," she waves her hand vaguely in the direction of the office, "Matt tends to make choices without consulting either of us. So, what brings you here?"

And suddenly, Peter isn't so sure.

He flashed back to the conversation him and Matt just shared, *God knows that I got a lot of shit when they found out about me.*

What if he got Matt in trouble again? He knew for a fact that the man didn't mention anything about Peter's situation to Foggy or Karen, and he didn't have a big enough opinion on either of them to know how they might react. Karen may be disappointed, but she seems to have warmed up to him pretty quickly. Foggy, however...

“I- um..”

Very articulate, bug brain.

Peter’s face flushed while Karen’s smile grew wider, patience exuding from her features. Taking a deep breath and manning up, he opened his mouth to say *I’m here for a job*, but was interrupted by Foggy’s voice cutting through the silence, yelling “Matt, I swear to everything, if this is who I think it is-!”

The door slammed open, causing Peter to startle a bit. Karen didn’t even flinch.

And like a villain in any cheesy movie, Foggy strolled out casually with a grin on his face. Peter could almost *see* smoke that would’ve pillared around his steps, orchestra in the background playing some type of dark melody.

Foggy made his way to Peter, sighing before asking “you here for a job?” Karen looked between the two, before unconsciously stepping closer to Peter. In lieu of words, he just closed his mouth and nodded minutely. Foggy closed his eyes before clasping his hands together, as if working himself up for something. Matt finally strolled out of the office, hair disheveled like he ran his fingers through it several times before making his appearance.

“Alright, kid.” Foggy started, before opening his arms out like asking for a hug. His fingers curled towards him a few times, before finishing off with “sob story. Lemme hear it. Lay it on me, make me cry.”

“Foggy, what do you think you’re doing?” Matt growled protectively. He put an arm in the middle of the two, effectively cutting either off from moving closer to each other. Karen’s eyes widened at the sudden shift, abandoning her post on the semi-side lines to stand shoulder to shoulder with Peter. Foggy, noticing that he’d been cornered, dropped his smile along with his faux happiness. “Matt, you and I both know that letting a *teenager* work in a *law firm* isn’t the smartest idea. I mean, come on! What qualifications does he even have?”

Karen chose that moment to speak up, asking “well what qualifications did I have when you took me in?” She crossed her arms, eyes hardening. Peter felt... small. He didn’t know what to say towards the man. Plus, there was a relative stranger sticking up for him. What was he supposed to say in that moment? He clenched his hands nervously, looking at Matt who looked like he was two steps away from unleashing his inner lawyer logistics on his friend.

Peter Parker didn't know what to do in those few moments, but luckily Spiderman did.

He stepped closer to Foggy, avoiding Matt and Karen's shocked looks. When he got close enough to smell the man's cologne, he steeled his expression. There was no outward weakness, gaze hardened on the man. "My name is Peter Parker, and I am the last living relative of the Parker family. My parents died when I was young, and I held my uncle as he bled out not even seven years ago."

Karen gasped quietly in the background, while Matt backed off. Foggy didn't show any reaction to his words, which only motivated Spiderman to continue. "A few months ago, my aunt was shot, like her husband. I watched her die as well. The only difference between both moments was that I didn't get the luxury to hold her, she didn't even know I was there. And ever since then, I have been on the run. Living in a warehouse on the outskirts of Queens."

There was a gentle hand placed on his back, but it didn't matter. His shoulders were pulled back defiantly, posture exuding power. "I have been beaten and knocked down, both metaphorically and literally. And I'm *sick* of it. So when I found Matt, he offered to change my destiny. Change my life, for the better. In the eyes of the court, I'm still a minor for at least another year and I'm legally obligated to be put in foster care, which I'm sure you know."

Spiderman blinked, listening to the heartbeats of the occupants of the room. While his remained steady, Karen's beat erratically in concern, while Matt's only rushed in fear for his friend. Foggy's remained neutral, just as his expression did.

"If I have an income, i'm able to get emancipated. Get my life back. Go to school, reconcile with everyone I've left behind. I've lost so much. My friends, my family. My way of life. The only thing stopping me from being able to pick myself up and be able to run, is you. So i'm sorry if my 'sob story' isn't as pitiful as you hoped for. Because I don't want anyone crying over me, I just want *help*."

Spiderman took a step back, and Peter held out his arm in the form of a handshake. "So, what do you say?" Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Matt smiling proudly. *Was he proud of me?* Karen moved her hand from his back, holding her breath in anticipation. If Foggy didn't let him work, then at least Peter knew that he could rely on the other two get the man to convince himself otherwise.

Silence stretched on for a few seconds, Peter's arm still extended. And finally, *finally*, Foggy's lips twitched up in a small smile. He grasped Peter's hand and shook it, bringing his other to encompass their grip on each other.

“That was a hell of a speech. Welcome to the team, kid.”

A collective exhale filled the room as Karen laughed, bringing her hands in front of her mouth. Matt shook his head, ‘looking’ towards the ground. Peter smiled in appreciation, cracking out the joke “hope you won’t regret this!” Foggy just rolled his eyes and scoffed, already warming up to the kid’s antics.

Peter turned to Karen to see her fanning her face in happiness, a close lipped smile taking over her face. “Gosh, I barely know you, and I just want to hug you. Is that alright? Can I hug you?” Peter laughed before nodding, opening his arms in wait. She quickly came forward and draped her arms over him, putting her head on his while closing her eyes.

On the next inhale, her eyes snapped open in recognition. She looked towards Matt accusingly, before taking a large inhale and masking it with a sigh, saying “I’m so sorry about everything, of course we’ll help you.” Peter melted in the embrace, while she was almost positive her eyes were wide enough to make her look like a bug. As quietly as humanly possible, she asked ‘*is that my shampoo?*’

Matt exploded in laughter, confirming her suspicions.

Originally, Peter’s position at the law firm was going to be fake. Just so it’d be stated that he had a source of income that paid well enough to let him live on his own, something to appease the court. And he was fine with it, obviously. It was just a necessary step in order to help the final goal.

And then he let it slip that he used to be a freelance photographer when Foggy asked things he liked to do that may help them find a specific job for him.

“You- wait, you used to take pictures?” He asked incredulously. “Like, good pictures?” At that, Peter shook his head like a bobblehead, pursing his lips and raising his shoulders modestly. “I was good enough to sell for the Bugle?”

And after pulling up a few of his old pictures, they’d finally established that Peter would be their photographic journalist/ law firm public relations person. Exclusively for Nelson and Murdock.

The job would be simple, easy, and straight up Peter's lane. He'd write articles about recent cases they'd taken and won, refer people to them, write about their credibility, knowledge, experience, and values through client statements, and ultimately attract more customers. He'd take pictures of them in action and have them accompany his articles, adding the extra realism.

Karen had been over the moon when he'd told her. Her hands were thrown up in the style of jazz hands, a small screech of joy running from her mouth. After her over the top happiness calmed down a bit, she told him that she'd help write the articles if he wanted and get the newspaper to feature it, since apparently she had connections. That way, he'd have his articles circulating online while she got them in the paper.

Matt had disappeared after Peter and Foggy started talking logistics about an hour ago, only re-appearing at the end of Karen's spiel. He had a smug smile adorning his face, hands propped one over the other while holding his walking stick. Almost immediately the teen knew that he had good news and was waiting to share. He probably sensed a pair of eyes on him, because Matt finally spoke up.

"I just got off the phone with a good friend of mine, Judge Harrow. After some careful persuasion and reminders of some deals he'd made, I was able to get us a few minutes of his time." At that, Foggy perked up and looked between Matt and Peter excitedly. "That's great! When? How long do we have to prepare?" Matt cocked his head to the side in thought before answering, "about forty five minutes."

After that, it'd been a flurry of movement. Foggy was spitting facts into Peter about emancipation process and all the things he'd need to know while Karen worked on closing down the office. Matt hung back and called a cab while gathering everyone's jackets so they'd be ready to go.

Once they were all rushing out the door and preparing themselves for the thirty minute drive, Peter had a sudden thought. He stopped his movements, causing the others to turn back in confusion. "You guys go," he started before anyone could question him, "I'll meet you there. I need to look up a few things with Karen." At the mention of her name, the woman's eyebrows furrowed. Realizing that *oh shit, that's gonna get confusing*, Peter clarified "my other friend, Karen. She helps me a lot."

Clarity rung over their heads as they finally understood, all turning towards the door once more. Foggy went to step, before seeming to remember something and whipped himself back around to the teen. "You have a phone? What's your number? I'll send you the address, along with any more information you'll need."

Thinking of his old phone still at the warehouse that was as dead as a doornail, Peter realized he fucked up. “Uh, yeah!” he said as to not draw suspicion. Rattling off his number, Foggy seemed happy and turned to leave. “Don’t be late, kid. It won’t look good to the judge. See you soon!” He waved as he exited the building, Peter putting on a fake smile while pretending to grab his phone from his suit pocket.

As soon as he knew he was in the clear, he unbuttoned his shirt and chucked off the suit jacket, revealing his red and blue costume underneath. The pants and shoes flew off as he whipped out his mask, throwing it over his styled- although now probably ruined- hair.

Lights flashed across the HUD for a second before Karen's voice filtered through the silence, causing the teen to unconsciously relax just a bit. “Hello, Peter. It’s nice to see you in good health.” He chuckled at her greeting before running through the building trying to find an exit. “Nice to see you too, dear. I have a few questions if you don’t mind.”

Finding the exit, Peter opened the door and looked around before scaling the wall, gaining the higher ground before risking swinging one handed, ruffled pieces of his suit in the other. “Of course, what is it?” Karen asked politely, somehow fabricating a tone of fondness.

Extending his arm out, Peter shot a web to a nearby building before shakily swinging, unused to using only one limb to websling. “Well first of all- not to sound rude or ungrateful or anything snobby like, but have you.. Have you let Tony know anything recently? Anything at all?”

The AI sounded... Almost quiet, when she replied. Like she didn’t want to do something, but she knew it was for the greater good. “Not since Protocol Teen Rebel was put into effect.” Spidey let out a sigh of relief as he did a flip in the air, shooting another web to the side to made a wide right turn. “That’s- okay. That’s good. Great. Fantastic. *Fantasmal*.” He paused. “Is that even a real word? Who even uses that anymore?” Karen seemed to set out her robotic form of a chuckle, before replying “you, apparently.”

A smile spread across his face at her witty reply, before grinning even harder when he passed the taxi that held Matt, Foggy, and Karen. Instinctually he held his fancy suit closer to his chest so that it was out of view, just in case one of them decided to look up and saw his flashy suit and recognized the pile hidden with his arm.

If he did an intricate spin and ended with a double flip as a way to show off despite them not knowing it was *him*, who was going to know?

Karen waited for him to finish his holler of joy before interrupting once more. “What were your

other questions, Peter?" At the reminder, his mind instantly went back on track. "Oh yeah! Sorry. Anyways, is there a way for you to connect to my phone? It hasn't been online in months, and I'm sure I have at least *some* messages that are long overdue, but I haven't had a time to charge it. And really, no need up until now."

A line of code flew through his peripheral as he stopped to take a short break on a building to catch his breath. There was still plenty of time to make it to the courthouse, so he wasn't worried about that. A few seconds later, Karen piped back up. "It seems as if you have twenty seven new messages, although there's a significant gap between twenty five of them and the other two. Would you like me to read them all?"

Twenty seven.

It had been months since he ran away, and there were only twenty seven messages. Twenty five if you didn't count the ones that were from Foggy.

Although that number was still pretty high, a part of Peter felt a stab of anger. Not enough to make him act out, but enough to put a frown on his face and dampen his mood the tiniest bit. "No need baby girl, just read out the recent ones."

She relayed Foggy's two messages ("Hey dude, it's me. Foggy. Not some random creep." The second has the address, along with a reminder not to be late.), before falling dutifully silent. Peter took the lull in conversation to sit down on the edge of the building, letting one leg dangle while the other stayed propped up to allow his elbow to rest on his knee.

Out of those twenty five dreaded texts, how many were condolences? People finding out about his loss, offering a hand that wasn't present when he didn't need it. How many were questions? Asking how he was, where he's been? Were any of those from Mr. Stark? MJ? Ned?

He squeezed his eyes shut, tilting his head towards the sky.

Should he listen to the messages before going to the courthouse, or should he wait? Let the knowledge rest on his conscious through the entirety of the day, or live blissfully ignorant? Or rather, should he just ask Karen to delete all of the messages? Not know who sent what, just get the texts out of his mind.

Logically, Peter knew that wouldn't happen.

“Karen, are there any messages from the contacts Ned and MJ?”

Silence.

It was almost deafening, anticipation nipping at his heels and crawling it's way up his body. Why would they text him? He fucked up and they had no need. But they were his friends, even if he pushed them away. They still had to care, right? Even with everything that happened between them, there had to have been at least a single text from either of-

“No. There doesn't seem to be any.”

Oh.

Oh.

“ Oh.”

Just like the air that breezed through the area, gently swaying the leaves of trees, Peter felt like he'd been taken away. Out of his body, just gazing down at everything. He didn't, *couldn't* feel anything, but that didn't scare him.

Nothing? They sent him nothing?

Yeah, they had a fallout. But if he knew that one of his friends went through something like he had, he would still at least send a message.

He was viewing his body sitting on the roof, and he knew this was *wrong*.

Something wasn't right, but when were things truly ever right?

“Karen.”

That was his voice, but had he really spoken?

“Yes, Peter?” She replied, oblivious to the fact that *i’m not in my body and something isn’t right and oh God someone help-*

“Activate protocol... The.. The space one. Spacy Brains..?”

Proto- what? Had he said that? He couldn’t have, because he was staring at *himself*, and his mouth didn’t move. Did it?

No. Because if it did then there would no doubt be a disgusting, ugly, cry that would rip from his throat. One that couldn’t fall under the guise of sadness, or one that was made of anger. Because he wasn’t feeling angry or sad, he wasn’t even feeling guilty. Peter felt numb, and it was such a stark contrast to his jovial mood a few minutes earlier, and maybe that’s why it’s slamming into him so hard. Because he was happy. He was fine. Everything was good and fine and like everything when May was alive and yet-

A loud and echoing beep resounded through his mask, shaking his brain and causing his sensitive ears to shrivel in protest. Instantly Peter wasn’t viewing this in third person, rather first, as he blinked heavily and saw his body attached to his head. Those few seconds of loud noise was enough, because after he practically writhed off the side of the building and onto the roof, the noise cut off. And he was back.

There was gravel from the rooftop digging into his suit. A car horn that honked a block away. The sun was still beating down on him, and air still filled his lungs. Peter was back in the present, and wasn’t floating away anymore.

Ned and MJ weren’t here. They weren’t going to help; they made it clear that they weren’t looking for reconciliation. And maybe if he allowed himself to dote on that, it would probably hurt more and bring up painful memories of their last interaction.

Karen hesitantly spoke once more, taking Peter out of his spiral of emotion filled thoughts. “Peter? Are you with me?” He swallowed spit that accumulated in his mouth, before nodding once. Twice. “Yeah,” he finally answered. “Yeah, i’m here. Deactivate protocol, no more loud noises needed to ground me.”

The AI beeped in response, giving Peter a few more seconds to just listen to the area of Hell's Kitchen he happened to land in. It occurred to him that he hadn't even asked if any of the messages were from Mr. Stark, but almost like another sense, he knew there wouldn't be.

Time seemed to pass slowly in those few moments. Seconds felt like minutes, minutes felt like hours. Eventually, Karen reminded him of his time limit which sent him back into the air, gripping his black and white suit like it was a bomb.

One tragedy at a time.

One solution at a time.

Peter somehow still arrived earlier than the taxi cab, giving him time to pull on his casual suit over his plain suit. A quick glance at the bathroom mirror showed that his hair was still relatively decent, but his face was flushed like he ran to the court house.

When Matt, Foggy, and Karen arrived at the steps of the building, they all started talking simultaneously to each other to ensure that everyone knew the procedure for what was about to happen. Peter noticed Matt looked tense as soon as he got out of the vehicle, so he stuck by his side and held his arm as a way to ground him. Slowly, his shoulders lowered and he was smiling more, so Peter counted that as a win.

"Alright boys, are you ready?" Karen asked, glancing at her wrist watch. All three pairs of eyes landed on the youngest of the group, who paused his sentence to think. Was he? He was about to make a life changing decision. One that separated him from everyone else, in a way. Tony wouldn't be here to help, May wouldn't be here, not even his old friends.

But the thought of a life where he could move on and thrive compelled him to finally shake his head, brown curls bouncing slightly with the motions. "Yeah," he swallowed, squaring his shoulders like he would do before a battle. "I'm ready."

With the final declaration, they all turned in formation with Matt and Peter in the middle, Karen on Peter's right and Foggy on Matt's left.

Taking a deep breath, Peter took the first step into progression.

The entire process was extended to a little more than an hour, and when they were finished, Peter was sure that they'd won the judge over.

At first, Judge Harrow was adamant because Peter was technically still a runaway. However with a few hushed whispers between him and Matt, something had changed. A flicker of recognition, like there was a relatableness in the teens story that triggered a faint memory in his mind.

Peter had to leave the room when they discussed some final details, but he didn't mind. Sitting on the bench outside of the doors gave him a chance to catch his breath and run over the entirety of their interactions.

An undefinable amount of time passed before the four occupants left the room, the judge sparing Peter a warm glance and smile. The teen shot out of his chair, already going in for a handshake. Harrow took his hand and shook, before bidding his farewell and walking off.

Without the judge present, Peter turned to his three friends. They all had an unreadable expression on their faces, causing a pit to form in the bottom of his stomach. *What if I didn't do good? Answered wrong, didn't have all the information. Oh God, what if he denied me--*

Karen's lips twitched up in a smile.

And suddenly, Peter could see through their act. Foggy looked brighter than usual, radiating with accomplishment. Matt was relaxed even while leaning on his cane, not leaning towards one side. And Karen, as much as she tried to mask it, was smiling just barely enough for someone who didn't know her to not catch it.

A (probably hysterical) laugh bubbled out of Peter's throat, and their masks were washed away. Karen enveloped him in a side hug and Foggy came to the side to clap him on the back. Matt just stood back, finally letting a grin out. Peter brought his arms up to encompass the one around his chest, because he's sure that if his legs gave out Karen would be the only thing holding him.

They were all talking, singing praise, but Peter didn't notice. He didn't notice the tears that streamed down his face, wasn't even aware that he was still laughing.

He was going to be free.

It would take four days for his case to go through. Four days of waiting, of gruelling anticipation.

They all decided to go back to Matt's place to celebrate. Almost as a last minute remembrance, Matt excused himself to "call his friend" who was staying at his apartment. Foggy and Karen both shook their heads, Peter feigning confusion.

The night was filled with joyful laughs and warm emotions. Inside jokes were exploited ("We're avocados at law, Marty!" "...Foggy, none of that sentence made sense. Marty, really?") and a few were made ("Peter, please, *God i'm begging you, never say that again.*")

Around twelve at night, Karen and Foggy announce their leave. They had to be at the office at eight in preparation for a new client who called earlier, so they wanted to at least get some semblance of sleep. Karen hugger Peter one last time, telling him that she was incredibly proud of him, while Foggy gave him a smile and a head nod, singing the same praise in a different manner.

And Peter felt light.

Like the last few months never happened. Any traces of his sadness was gone from his psyche, body physically healthy once more. He was smiling, he was *feeling*, and any bad events were pushed to the back of his mind where they were forgotten. In these moments, there was nothing that could ruin his night.

Matt went to say goodnight after giving Peter a new set of clothes. "We're going to have to go shopping for you at some point," he joked. "My drawers are starting to look barren." The teen gratefully accepted the pyjamas, smile playing on his lips. "Oh shut up, you act like there isn't such thing as a washer and dryer."

The quip gained yet another smile out of the man, head turned towards the ground. "Get some

sleep, champ. These next few days are gonna be an emotional wreck.” Matt raises his hand and ruffled Peter’s hair, but shortly stopped, looking momentarily stricken. Confusion dawned heavily over the shorter of the two, wondering what in the hell was shocking to make the infamous Daredevil look so thrown off.

His fingers slowly spreader around the curls on Peter’s head, almost like he was observing. They moved to the side of his head as if counting every hair follicle, before grazing to the other side. “Matt..?” Peter asked, resisting the urge to cock his head to the side.

Matt seemed to snap back towards reality, quickly removing his hand from Peter’s head. He cleared his throat awkwardly, before explaining himself. “Sorry, that was probably weird...”

It took Peter’s brain a few seconds to compute what may have happened just now. And finally, he realized. Incredibly enhanced senses. His hair was still soft from his shower, despite being tucked in a mask earlier. And thanks to whatever genetic inheritance he was given from his parents, his hair was *super* soft. His curls probably felt nice against Matt’s sensitive fingers, a drastic change to the toughness of everyday life.

A small chuckle erupted from Peter’s chest as he scratched at his neck, mentally preparing himself for the admission he was about to make. Matt could probably tell he was embarrassed with the rush of heat to his face and his awkwardly fast beating heart. “Nah Matty, it’s alright. My... My aunt..., when I was little, she would run her hands through my hair when I was upset. It would always calm me down. No idea if it still works, though. Needless to say, it’s nice.”

And why was Peter getting choked up over mentioning May?

Before he could question himself more, to his surprise, he noticed Matt blushing too. Like a child when they were caught doing something weird, and they knew it wasn’t right but it was still fun to do. Deciding to save Matt from perpetual awkwardness, Peter walked by to change his clothes. When he finished and brushed his teeth and walked out of the bathroom, Matt was already laying in bed with the lights turned off.

Smiling to himself, Peter decided to close the door and locate one of his web shooters, cycling through the combinations before coming upon his most long lasting one. Within minutes, the corner of Matt’s apartment roof was turned into a spider’s haven; web hammock secure and ready to hold the boy.

Climbing up the wall and situating himself in the surprisingly comfortable- but not unexpected- web, Peter went to sleep with the thought of flying to wherever he wanted, not held back, no

barriers attempting to stop him

Four more days.

Peter woke up feeling like shit, and wondered how Matt knew that things wouldn't be smooth sailing.

He started his day with the screaming sensation of his spidey sense, and before he could even gain enough consciousness to react his webbing gave out, sending him plummeting to the ground. Shortly after he screeched, Matt came rushing out ready to attack.

Spidey just told him that he tripped and fell. Neither mentioned how his perfect balance wouldn't allow that.

Turned out that Matt also had to show up for their new client, which left Peter home alone to surround himself with his thoughts. Which sucked. Everything seemed to be coated in a layer of blue, nothing radiating the happiness that was there hours previous. The tiredness was back, seeping into his cells and circulating throughout his heart, sending the dull ache to each limb and variation.

His thoughts were filled with scenarios of death, most vague memories he was forced to carry. The others were fabricated, an illusion his mind wouldn't allow him to ignore. Ned getting pummeled by The Rhino, MJ suffocating under a building. That one, his mind wasn't kind about.

He knew what that felt like, so it had more to go off of.

And then, of course, May and Ben. That memory had him curling in on himself on Matt's couch, shaking and seeing exactly what he had days before in the alley. But Tony wasn't there that time, Tony was laying with them.

And *that* was a thought Peter wasn't prepared for.

So needless to say, today wasn't a good day. And it wasn't even afternoon yet.

The only thing that Peter could think about that would clear up his treacherous thoughts was save people, so reluctantly he uncurled himself and changed into his Spidey suit once more, taking the flight of stairs and jumping off the roof. Karen greeted him in her usual tone, which was something he needed.

Spiderman spent the day webslinging around New York, cruising through Hell's Kitchen, taking a trip Upstate, and then finally landing in Queens.

He stopped for pictures, bought lunch for a little girl, and stopped to pet every dog he found.

Yet nothing filled the void that kept building under his sternum, only allowing him to breathe the bare minimum needed to survive.

When he got a message from Karen telling him that Matt got his phone number and was at his place with food, Spiderman felt a twinge of something else. An emotion he couldn't identify in the moment. He told her to tell him that he was an hour away, but he'll be there in twenty.

Roughly twenty six minutes later, Spidey was ripping his mask off in the safety of the apartment. Matt had his legs kicked up on his coffee table, tie loosened with a slice of pizza half eaten resting in his palm.

"Bad day?" Matt asked, cocking his head in Peter's direction.

In lieu of an answer, Peter flopped down on the couch right next to the man, curling into his side. Matt chuckled before draping an arm around the boy as if he's done it for years. "Guess that's my answer."

Matt's hands ran through Peter's curls, leaning closer in response and slowly relaxing his muscles that he didn't even know were tight. He'd grunted in response to the earlier statement, before closing his eyes and sighing. He could smell the pizza in the kitchen, but he didn't have the appetite for it yet.

"I'm going to visit the church later tonight, if you'd like to join me," Matt offered. Peter thought about everything and anything in the span of a few seconds. A replay of all his toxic thoughts

throughout the day, ghosts of memories built over the few months. Hesitantly, Peter asked "...How do you do it? Believe, I guess.. After everything that's happened."

Matt, to his credit, only stiffened a bit and stopped playing with Peter's curls. Slowly he started his movements once more, choosing to face the kitchen rather than the boy. A few moments pass before he replies, only whispering "I don't."

Peter scrunched his eyebrows, face twisting in confusion. "But.. But you're going to church? And catholic, right? How..?" Matt chuckled, voice sounding far away. "You know, I can't really explain it. There's moments where I choose to believe, and moments where I know he isn't there. He won't help, and i'm on my own."

Those words resonated throughout the apartment, striking a cord in Peter's soul. The relatableness of that statement would've sent him staggering if he were standing. But Matt seemed oblivious to the bombshell he dropped, because he continued speaking in hushed whispers. "But God's plan is like a beautiful tapestry. And the tragedy of being human is that we only get to see it from the back. And all the..ragged threads and the muddy colors, and we only get a hint of the true beauty that would be revealed if we could see the whole pattern on the other side, as God does."

The younger boy hummed in response, mulling over the words. Matt, as though snapping back to reality, just took a bite out of the now cold pizza still in his hand.

Peter went to sleep and dreamt of endless possibilities of anything and everything.

Three more days until he was free.

The next day was significantly better.

For one, Peter wasn't harshly awakened. In fact, the only indication that he was truly awake was the slowly growing awareness of his senses. One second, things are black. The next, there's a very subtle weight covering his body. Fuzzy; soft against his arms. A squishy surface under his head, and the slight smell of pancakes. Humming and whispered conversations from somewhere far- or was Peter just not cognizant enough to realize they were next to him?

Like pulling a rope, awareness slowly crept closer. And once it did, Peter didn't regret it.

He fell asleep on the couch, but somehow Matt smuggled him onto his bed. The man wasn't anywhere in the close proximity that was accessible to his eyes, but shortly after he realized that the conversation consisted of the trio he's grown to know.

Smiling in anticipation, Peter got up and stretched his body, bones cracking and sending a wave of relief over him. He padded his way out of the room, eyes landing on Karen at the stove first, then traveling to see Foggy and Matt sitting next to each other, their backs turned to him. They were all in business attire, and slowly he remembered something about their client the other day.

Matt must've known he was up (screw his crazy senses) because he just sent a wave behind him, raised arm causing Foggy to give him a questioning glance before turning and spotting the teen. "Ah, he rises!" He jokes, shooting his arms to the sky. Karen looked up from her pancakes, eyes widening in amusement. "Gosh, and *I* thought *I* had bad morning hair!"

Peter rolled his eyes, cracking a smile. Somehow he found his way in between Foggy and Matt, unconsciously leaning on Matt and bringing his hand to rest in his unruly curls. The man sighed before messing with each strand, continuing to drink his coffee as if he wasn't aware his other hand was occupied.

Foggy and Karen shared a look, before continuing the conversation once more.

Eventually the pancakes were served (Matt subtly giving Peter some of his food since he was aware of his enhanced metabolism) and the conversation died down to business related chatter. At one point, Foggy dropped his fork as if deciding he *needed* to, before turning to Peter and asking "how do you feel about joining us in court to snap a few pictures for your first article, kiddo?"

And that's how Peter found himself *taking pictures* in the middle of a heated argument between Matt and another lawyer.

Awestruck wasn't the right word to describe how he felt, but it was pretty damn close.

Peter had seen Daredevil work before. He moved with the fury of hell buried in his bones, and spoke with the unmistakable sound of madness on his tongue. His eyes held the devil and his fists felt like scorch marks. He clawed his way through to get what he needed, mercy being a foreign concept. Devil was an understatement. Devil was too nice; too innocent for what he was. Daredevil was *terrifying*. He wasn't anything you hoped to see, because if you did, you knew there was no chance of retribution for your actions.

But Matt? When he was in the courtroom, he was completely different, yet the same. A precise juxtaposition from the man who held Peter as he cried, from the man who fights with evil incarcerating his every molecule. Matt was concise, an enigma that allured the courtroom. His words were coated in honey, but were delivered with the sting of a bee. Facts built on facts, there was no shaking his logic. Before the other side could even protest, Peter could already tell that Matt won the jury over. Foggy and Karen must've known too, because they were smiling winningly behind their desk.

When it was all said and done, Peter looked through the pictures triumphantly. Even though he didn't do much in terms of working as the legal team, he was able to work behind a camera once more.

The trio had to stay behind to discuss final matters with their client, before meeting up in the front and hailing a taxi. High fives were extended across the lot of them, promise of celebration later that night.

Foggy somehow predicted the win, seeing as there was already beer at the house. Him and Karen both went ahead and opened a bottle, Matt foregoing it so that Peter wouldn't be the only one not drinking. The latter instead went to the computer Karen let him borrow, instantly uploading the photos onto the drive before typing up a storm.

The world fell away as Peter recalled the events of the day, pouring every thought and emotion into an informative article. His fingers felt like fire, as if they'd burn if he stopped typing for longer than a second. Once he started, he couldn't, and wouldn't, stop. The words flowed freely, letters seeming to glow in front of Peter's eyes, telling him what specific pattern to type and allow full sentences to be imprinted onto the website.

Time flew, and the next thing he knew, was that Karen and Foggy had both passed out on the couch adjacent to him. A quick glance outside showed that it was in fact dark, despite the beautiful coloring of the billboard trying to convince him otherwise. Matt was gone, a little letter saying he was 'out' stuck across Foggy's forehead. A smile paved its way onto Peter's face once he realized the connotations of the small note.

And when he looked back down at the laptop, he realized that he was done.

Pride went through his veins at the accomplishment, a happy sound making its way from the back of his throat. Adjusting the sentence structures so he could squeeze some of his favorite pictures onto the space, Peter looked at the top right button, displaying the simple command.

“Publish?”

The mouse hovered over the red box, before the sound of a click resonated throughout the relatively silent apartment.

Peter went to bed with a smile on his face, dreaming of May praising him for his work.

Two more days until he was free.

Spiderman was helping a young girl find her aunt.

He was leisurely swinging through Hell’s Kitchen, taking the quietness of Karen’s crime monitor in grace. But as he perched upon the roof of a random bodega, his sensitive hearing picked up on the quiet choked sob coming from an alley a few streets down.

Making haste, he held out his wrist and flung through the wind at a relatively fast pace until he was landing in front of the alley, people gawking at the red suit. Looking in, he could see the girl crouched low to the ground, huddling in on herself.

“Hey, kiddo,” he said. The girl startled and looked up, Spiderman momentarily frozen in place at the sight of her big green eyes filled with tears. She scuttled away and tried to press herself closer to the concrete of the alley behind her, sniffing and bringing a sweater coated hand to her nose.

Raising his hands in the universal sign for ‘okay, okay,’ he stepped further in as to not attract any unwanted eyes. “S-stay back!” She yelled, voice trembling. Instantly Spiderman dropped to the floor, crossing his legs so that they were crossed over each other. “Hey, it’s okay. I’m Spiderman, ever hear of me?” He gestured to the spider insignia on his chest, the white irises of his mask squinting in the representation of a smile. Recognition seemed to flutter across her face, before being shut down with a new onslaught of tears.

“Are you.. A-Are you here to s-save me?” She quietly whispered. Whatever pieces of Peter’s heart that managed to stay intact completely shattered as he responded in the same voice “yeah, yeah I am. Where are your parents? Are you lost?”

With the hesitation of a startled deer, she slowly uncurled from herself and inched her way towards him. "I live with my aunt." She replied, swallowing her fear. "Okay, I feel legally obligated to ask your name before I take such a nice lady home!" He joked, mood lifting with her playful giggle. She wiped at her face once more, before replying "Alice. My name is Alice."

"Alright Alice," Spiderman said smiling with relief. "How about we get out of this crusty alley and go back home? Whaddya' say?" He doesn't dare move from his crossed position on the floor. By this point Alice was in reaching distance of him, light brown hair shining slightly in the light of the sun peeking through. Ever so slowly, she nodded in his direction.

"Sweet! Can I pick you up? We can swing around and have fun if you want!" He tried, finally uncrossing his legs and getting up. She rattled off her address and Karen gave the route he would need to take. Now no longer crying, Alice was practically buzzing with happiness.

And that's how Spiderman was found swinging through Hell's Kitchen with a little girl squealing in his arms. He was extra careful with each release of web, not doing some of his more extravagant maneuvers. In the few short minutes he had where Alice wasn't freaking out with glee, he learned that her favorite color was blue, she's in fourth grade, and that she has a dog named Peanut.

She promised him that he would get to pet Peanut if he was out.

Spiderman laughed.

It only took about ten minutes, but they were finally down the street Alice's house was on. "That's my home! That's my home!" She yelled, pointing at the building. Deciding that it'd probably be easier to knock on the door than swing her to her room, he brought them to the front of her lawn before releasing the final strand of web.

She clambered down as soon as they were safe, running with her hands in the air and wind swept hair flying in every direction. The front door opened to reveal an elderly lady who looked absolutely stricken, eyes flooding with relief at the sight of her missing family member. She almost fell when she ran down the steps of her house to meet Alice halfway, both crying out of glee. Spiderman felt awkward just standing there, until a small maltese puppy came trotting out of the house and instantly made his way towards the superhero.

Joy flooded through his veins as he picked up who he assumed Peanut was, giggling when the puppy licked at his mask. The sound seemed to remind Alice of his presence, because she tugged

on her aunt's shirt and said "Aunt May! Look! It's Spiderman! He saved me!"

The name sent any previous emotions to a screeching halt, muscles tensing in place. Peanut continued to wiggle in his arms, trying to reach his mask once more to attack it with slobber. A sadistic kind of hope flashed through his mind, asking *is she really here?*

But of course she wasn't. He watched her die, and Alice wouldn't even know who she was.

But Aunt May- *her* Aunt May- turned towards him and flashed him the same kind smile that his always showed, and there was no stopping the tears that sprung in his eyes.

"Thank you," she whispered gratefully, before repeating the sentence several more times in a rising tone. By the time she was finished, her arms were draped over him in the form of a hug, Peanut squished between the two. Senses coming back to him, he brought his free arm around her shoulder. "It's absolutely no problem; it's what I do!" He tried to say jovially, but suspected it fell flat. And with his next inhale, his knees almost buckled.

She even smelt like His relative.

The similarities were few, but they were there. They were present, and they were enough to send Peter spiraling.

Alice, oblivious to his inner turmoil, came up and grabbed Peanut from his hand, ruffling the puppy's fur.

Peanut.

Peter.

Good Lord, i'm comparing my name to a dog's name.

Karen said something about elevated heart rate, but he paid it no mind. May was still praising him and scolding Alice in the way he was familiar with.

Eventually he found a reason to leave, muscles still tight with tension. Both of them waved him goodbye, and he swung away quicker than usual.

He went straight home- *No, not his home. He didn't have a home, because his last connection to home was dead* .- And went to sleep, not caring about the time.

His last thought was that he was stupid for ever believing he was over May.

When Peter woke up again, it was dark outside. Matt was putting on his Daredevil costume in the next room, pausing his movements once he realized the teen was up once more.

He called out “welcome to the land of the living, Pete.” before continuing his almost nightly ritual. Peter climbed out of the bed and saw his suit laying folded on the drawer next to him, freshly washed.

He'd have to thank Matt for that later.

Daredevil, in all of his scary glory (minus the headpiece), stood proudly in the middle of the living room. Instantly, it was as if he commanded the very molecules of the room, demanding the temperature be lower, sound absent to create silence that only he can break.

Peter took a step and sighed, astounded once more by the transformation between Matt and Daredevil.

“Your article made it into the newspaper, you know.” Daredevil (or should he say Matt? The helmet *is* off...) told him, not turning around. A flutter of happiness went through Peter, a nice change from the dull ache he felt. “You’re really a hit. Check out your online piece.”

He finally turned around to face Peter, a hint of a smile on his face. Giving him a questioning look, Peter wobbled over to the laptop and powered it on.

The first website to be pulled up was his, and he was absolutely *floored*.

There were somehow hundreds of comments, with over six thousand views. People applauding him for his work, others asking for more. A few even saying that they'll keep a lookout for the next time he writes, and even more saying they'll be in contact with Nelson and Murdock very soon.

For the first time since he swung down the streets with Alice, Peter smiled.

He looked up at Daredevil, seeing that he was now in full suit with an air of expectancy around him. He cocked his head to the side in his almost characteristic way before asking a simple question.

“Are you coming?”

Minutes later, Daredevil and Spiderman could be found prowling the streets of Hell's Kitchen.

In those moments, it didn't feel like there were two more days until he was free. Because glancing at the man next to him, he realized he already was.

One day.

Twenty four hours.

One thousand, four hundred forty minutes.

Eighty six thousand, four hundred seconds.

That's all there was left, until Peter accomplished his goal.

Until he was officially back into society as Peter Parker, photographic journalist for Nelson and Murdock, emancipated teenager.

To say he was excited would be an understatement. Perhaps that's what lead to him falling asleep hanging off of a web in the early hours of the morning after spending the night with Daredevil.

Maybe that's why he still had his costume on, mask strewn across the couch he was hanging above.

Maybe that's why he forgot about Foggy and Karen coming over to discuss his article.

"Wait a gosh darn minute--"

"Oh my god, you're--!"

...The rest of the day was spent with hasty explanations and showing off with some of his abilities and acrobatic skills.

Late that night, Peter was standing in front of the window planted on the far wall of Matt's apartment. Dull thudding of raindrops against the glass perfected the calm ambience that draped over every surface, beautiful mixes of purple, blue, and hints of pink reflecting from the digital sign in front, washing Peter and the floor under him in the mix.

Time was lost on him, and it wasn't until Foggy stepped next to him that Peter realized he was probably zoned out of it for longer than what's considered normal. The other man's presence sent a new kind of euphoria settling in his chest. A gentle reminder.

This was his life now.

The pelting of raindrops continued as the silence stretched, neither wanting to shatter the quiet.

Matt had walked Karen home before going out as Daredevil, insisting that a rainy night wouldn't stop crime.

Karen and Foggy laughed like they understood what it meant. Peter sighed and rolled his eyes knowingly.

Finally, as if the barrier was broken, Foggy finally initiated a conversation, starting with a simple "It's really beautiful, isn't it?"

Peter turned his head to face the man, appreciating the way his white business shirt was practically swimming in the subdued colors. Foggy turned to make eye contact, blue eyes boring into his brown ones.

A smile and huff of breath came from Pete before he turned to look back out of the window, answering "yeah. It really is."

Silence lapsed once more as they both became lost in their thoughts, reveling in the presence of each other. Things were soft, for lack of a better word. Everything was fine. Peter was fine. He wasn't running, he wasn't sad. Sure, there was the underlying ache that seemed to never really go away, but even that was subdued to the nature of the room he was standing in.

A few more minutes passed before Foggy cleared his throat, looking down and shuffling his feet. Slowly, as if mesmerized by the sight outside, Peter turned to face the man once more. He noted that his heart rate seemed to pick up in the slightest, tempo changing a few clicks. Not enough to cause concern, but only enough worth cataloging.

"So... I was thinking, right?" Foggy started, and Peter couldn't help himself as he held up his arms, hands shaking with purpose. "Oh *no*," he drawled out, "we're all doomed!" Foggy chuckled and punched his arm lightly, Peter feigning a stumble to follow with his own laughter.

When that died down, the blonde picked back up where he left off. "Well, your suit was made by Stark, right? Which is *wicked*, by the way. Hope you know that," he pointed at Peter before continuing. "He could've put in some tracking, is what I'm saying. So- you're free to do whatever you want, might I add- but isn't that a little scary?"

And if only Foggy knew the turmoil he just unleashed on Peter.

He was right, Tony *had* put trackers in his suit. If he wanted, he could have FRIDAY pull up his movements; find exactly where he was. He'd find Matt's apartment, come barreling in. He could probably even pull up past movements and track where he previously moved.

With all the thoughts that barreled in the walls of Peter's brain, one question stuck out.

Why didn't he come?

Why did Tony not jump in? In any of those days that Peter had been alone, curled in a ball with only the voice of Karen to guide him, why hadn't Tony done anything?

"Y'know, Matt has a guy who repairs his suit. He'd probably be able to get you a new one, too. Keep all the spidey looking stuff, maybe darken the colors. You're a little flashy, dude." Foggy brought up, oblivious smile directed towards him.

And... A new suit. That sounded nice. It'd be cutting his ties with Tony completely, letting him lose that part of his life. He could split his memories into a simple before and after; Before the man was apart of his life, and after he was gone.

But for some odd reason, a reason Peter couldn't pinpoint, he didn't *want* Tony gone. If he was gone, he could never come. And even if he doesn't show it now, there's that slim chance that he will. He'll come back, he'll stay. They would fall back into their dynamic they had before, the dynamic Peter didn't realize he missed so much until he had the option to completely lose it.

So Peter chose to naïvely believe that the man actually cared. He was just busy, right? He couldn't waste his time watching some teenager swing around. But at the same time...

He cleared his throat, coughing a bit. "I'll keep the suit, I don't want to get rid of Karen" he lamely replied, wondering if Foggy would catch that there's more to the story. "Although... I'll get rid of the tracking. Find the specific wires, bring them somewhere else. Probably the warehouse, I have to make sure nobody took my stuff since I've been gone."

A cloud of sadness flashed through Foggy's eyes before the emotion was hidden, replaced with confusion. "Can you even do that? That's like, smart people stuff. *Insanely* smart people stuff."

A devilish grin spread over Peter's face. "You haven't seen me in action, have you?"

Not even fifteen minutes later, Peter was holding the specific line in his suit that tracked his movements. Foggy was gaping next to him, eyes flickering over the inner designs of the suit in disbelief. “You- wha- *how*?? Is that- are you sure that’s even the right wire?” He fumbled. Peter just humbly shrugged, closing his hand into a fist. “Positive. Insanely smart, remember?” He tapped his forehead twice, before moving to take off his clothes. Foggy snapped out of his stupor long enough to screech- very manly, might he add- before turning away. “Dude, warn a brother next time!”

The teen laughed as he stepped into the suit, throwing the mask on and greeting Karen. Foggy turned back around hesitantly before sighing in relief in finding the fully clothed superhero in front of him.

Spiderman turned so that he could jump up and make his exit for his rather long journey through the door that lead to the roof, but he suddenly remembered something. Turning back around, he stated “you may wanna go home, unless you’re planning on crashing here. I’ll be out a while.”

Foggy blinked. Then blinked again. Then finally responded with “ *you look so cool.*”

Laughter filled the room, drowning out the subtle sounds of the last of the rain drops.

Karen lit up the pathway he’d need to take to make it back to the warehouse, and Spiderman started to make his leave. Once he got to the door and had his hand on the knob, however, Foggy called out his name.

“While you’re there, you might as well grab your stuff. Something tells me Matt wouldn’t mind sharing his space with you.” He winked, a genuine smile playing on his lips.

Peter stood frozen for a few seconds, before nodding in lieu of an answer.

When he got to the warehouse, everything was as he left it.

And when he left, there was no signs that he was ever there. No sign of any life, except for the tiny white wire resting on the dusty desk near the corner of the area.

Matt and Peter went to the courthouse as soon as it was opened.

It took thirty minutes, thirty minutes too long.

But, it happened.

It finally happened.

Peter had the documents in his hands, unable to read through his shaky limbs and tear filled eyes.

Peter was officially emancipated.

He was *free*.

.....

Tony... Hadn't *exactly* been *meaning* to put off searching for Peter.

But old habits die hard, and the next day where he told FRIDAY he would go through the logs, he didn't. Barely even entertained the idea, instead throwing himself in his work. There was a new StarkPhone that needed to be built by that afternoon so he could present it to the board of directors, and he wasn't exactly close to being finished.

So the first day, Tony did nothing.

The second day, FRIDAY reminded him of his personal mission. Subsequently, he was arms deep in the middle of an Iron Man suit trying to fix a broken compartment near the curve of the spine. And of course, since fixing the suit was now more of a monotonous thing with how much he's had to engineer or fix, his thoughts were running rampant.

And of course, they were centered around Peter.

Of the way he carried himself, like the weight of the world rested on his shoulders, but he was fine. The way his smile lit up his expressive eyes. The way he talked when he got excited over something small that Tony wouldn't really pay attention to, like a dog he saw on patrol or a particularly hard math equation that he managed to figure out.

...He was reminded of the way his hands shook after the fight in the airport with Rogers. How his inquisitive eyes scanned over Tony's black eye and broken body. The way his breath caught in his throat when he thought of something particularly bad. How he always put himself after everyone else, forgetting about his problems to ensure that everyone else was alright.

Tony thought about the last time he saw Peter, and he wanted to curb stomp himself for letting go.

That day, Tony found that it was easier to bury his mind and hands in gadgets and gizmos than think about how much he let Peter down, and drove away one of the most important people of his life.

The third day blended with the second, sleep a foreign concept to the Man Made of Iron. *But that isn't really right, is it? Because you can be broken, bent, shattered. You're as fragile as copper and as brittle as glass. You aren't Iron Man, you are conflict manifested into a body.*

Tony took those thoughts and wielded them like they were swords. He wouldn't allow them to harm him, wouldn't be tempted to enter a catatonic state of self loathing. Tony was a man on a mission; a mission he promised he'd start days ago.

With the spur of motivation, Tony pulled up Karen's logs and settled into his lab chair, hands wringing together as he asked FRIDAY to start from the beginning.

It took all night for Tony to finally get through everything.

And *God*, he was so, so, utterly *stupid* for not listening before.

With every broken bone, every contusion that Karen listed, Tony found at least twenty possible ways he could've prevented it. Every time Karen reported he wasn't returning to his house, every single day he missed school.

When she reported the emotional distress the boy was feeling, how his heart rate elevated beyond what was alright when he was scared. Tony listened to Peter calm himself down from panic attacks, listen to the teenager say that he was alone and that was *okay*..

May was never a topic of conversation, Tony noted.

(He'd have to look into that.)

By the time the sun was peeking through the blinds of the window on the opposite wall, Tony didn't feel anything. He felt as numb as he did laying in that Siberian bunker in his dead suit, waiting for somebody to get his distress signal. When the cold seared its way into his bones after flying through Oklahoma, finding himself in the middle of nowhere with only an expanse of white to greet him. He was reminded of the comfort only liquor seemed to provide, and wondered if this was any better.

Suddenly, the tower's walls were too close.

The next thing Tony realized, was that at some point he must've blackened out. One moment he's standing in his lab listening to all the ways he failed his-- *the* kid, and the next he's sitting on a bench in central park, donning an inconspicuous jacket and hat, glasses obscuring his face.

He looked around at all the families. At the couple jogging around the pavement, at the two young kids playing frisbee. At the cat who was lounging on the branch of a tree, at the old man feeding the pigeons.

There was a presence next to him.

Every so slowly, Tony's muscles tensed up. Ready to run; ready to fight. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see that it was just a man. A brittle, wrinkly, old man. Someone's grandpa, perhaps. But even with that logic, Tony couldn't seem to calm down.

Anyone could be an enemy.

He learned that lesson the hard way.

The man wrinkled his fingers together, not turning to Tony as he asked "it's such a nice day outside, isn't it?"

No. It isn't. Today is absolutely horrible because it has to correlate with how I'm feeling. The sun is too bright. The birds are too loud. This damn city is too loud. I need to escape. I need to do something, anything, I need to find Peter--

"My name's Stan. What about you, stranger?"

Tony bristled at his thought process. The man was trying to be *friendly*, damnit. He turned to face the man who looked to be about seventy, blue glasses tinting his outfit. Swallowing what felt like a boulder, he simply replied "Tony. My name is Tony."

Stan smiled then, mustache rising with the motion. "Well Tony, penny for your thoughts?"

And if Tony wasn't off set about the guy before, he sure was now.

He squinted behind his sunglasses, about to question the man, before Stan waved a hand in the air as a sign of dismissal. "You were sitting here for twenty minutes looking like you fell in a coma. I was worried you died or something, you only started moving when you noticed I was here. So, what's on your mind to make you look like a corpse in the middle of Central Park?"

Maybe something broke in him. Looking into the sincere eyes of the man. Seeing that emotion that hasn't been directed towards him in *so* long. Hearing the joke and not feeling the need to retaliate. Perhaps it was the fact that he had no clue he wasn't just talking to a regular Tony, he was talking to Tony *Stark*. Maybe it was just the general aura Stan projected that had Tony sighing, shoulders slumping in defeat.

“I fucked up. Pushed someone away I shouldn’t have, and now I have no idea where he is and if he’s okay. No, you now what? Scratch that. I *know* he’s not okay. And it’s my fault for not opening my eyes sooner and realizing that distancing myself wasn’t the best option, it was the absolute *worst*.” He explained, feeling the inquisitive eyes of Stan on him.

Once he was finished, he looked back towards Stan. Expected to see thinly veiled disgust. Apprehension, anything that he was used to getting after spewing an inkling of his troubles. But instead, there was something else. Sadness? However unlike anyone else, there was understanding in the gaze. He wasn’t sad *for* Tony. He was sad *with* Tony.

He felt even more like an idiot for believing this man was a threat.

As if sensing that Tony’s venting was over, Stan pursed his lips and shook his head up and down slowly a few times. Silence passed between them, only outside factors keeping it from becoming awkward. They finally made eye contact, and Stan hesitated a few more seconds before saying “you really care about him, don’t you?” It wasn’t a question; it was a statement. One that was already answered, didn’t need to be repeated. Even then, Tony found himself nodding along.

Stan seemed to have a glint in his eye, one only acquired with age. “Did you know we’re all galaxies?” Tony stared at him like he was insane, but he only looked towards the sky with a happy smile on his face. “We’re made up of constellations forged through triumph, stars burning bright with memories. We’re all separate, but the same. Comets fly through us, spaceships explore us.”

“Many are scared of our potential. They fear our growth, don’t want to get close to a galaxy that rivals their own. So I must ask you, Tony. Are you scared of this boy and his stars? Or are you scared that yours won’t mix well with his?”

Stan huffed, looking down to the grass. “Will you make more stars with him and grow both of your galaxies to intertwine more than they already are, or are you going to let the infinite amount of darkness consume the light you’ve made?”

...Needless to say, to put it in the absolute simplest terms, Tony was floored.

Because throughout that extended metaphor, with all of the tiny bits with connecting memories and experiences and growth along with denial and retribution, Tony understood. He understood everything Stan had said, and was *so* happy this man happened to stumble upon what he assumed was a dead body.

Tony was a galaxy, and his galaxy was dependant on others.

Peter was a galaxy, who outshone everyone else's.

And Tony had *let that go*.

With a new vigor, Tony got up from the bench. He adjusted his jacket, fixed his cap. Pushed his glasses farther up his face, then turned to Stan. "Thank you," he said honestly. The man smiled up at him, friendliness seeming to ooze from his person. He put a business card next to him where Tony was previously. "The next time you feel lost, find this card. It'll remind you and guide you through your stars. Good luck, Tony."

Tony picked up the card gratefully, a part of him relieved he wasn't directly handed it. The design was simple, the entirety of the card white except at the edges, where cracks seemed to come from the sides. Under, was a picture of space. Stars. And in the dead middle, was a simple message.

Stan Lee

Excelsior!

Tony smiled as he pocketed the card, walking away with the reminder to frame it once he gets back to the tower.

For now, he's going to start the Spidey hunt.

"Boss," FRIDAY's voice cut through the silence of the lab he once again occupied. "I've managed to detect the location Peter has most frequented, as per guidelines of the Teen Rebel protocol." She paused, before adding "it also appears that the tracker is there, although I'm not sure why Karen has told me that bit of information..."

Tracker.

The tracker for Peter's suit.

“Yeah, girl?” Tony asked, allowing a twinge of hope to bud itself in his soul. “How long has it been there?” If it’d only been a few moments, then he knew that it would be pointless to fly over to the location. However, when FRIDAY answered “It hasn’t moved since late last night, sir,” Tony was already hating the hope that grew in his chest.

Somehow, he knew he was going to be let down.

(It didn’t stop him from smiling.)

Tony didn’t ask the location. He just jumped in his suit and let FRIDAY lead the way. His mind was racing with endless possibilities, endless outcomes, on how this was going to go about. He already knew that wherever he was going wouldn’t be the same shitty apartment he’d first found the boy in; after listening to all the reports he knew Peter hadn’t been there in some time.

Maybe him and May moved? That may be where FRIDAY was taking him. That’d explain the complete lack of stay at their old place. But as the seconds drawled on and the suit flew farther away from the middle of Queens and more into the rural areas, Tony started getting concerned. Why would they downgrade? Thoughts of May’s job and Peter’s age flowed through his mind, and he *prayed* that it wasn’t because they couldn’t afford it anymore.

If that were the case, Tony thought he’d die of regret.

“We’re here, Boss” FRIDAY interrupted, slowing down and stopping above the area. Tony looked around confusingly, using his repulsors to keep him steady. There weren’t any signs of the vibrant suit he’d manufactured. In fact, there weren’t any houses. “Uh, not to doubt you babygirl, but there’s nothing here. Nothing but-”

But a warehouse.

“...The signal is coming from under us.” FRIDAY hesitantly replied.

The warehouse was under him.

An onslaught of thoughts flew like bullets through Tony's mind, answers following the questions like a loose petal follows the wind. Why was Peter spending his time here? What did May have to say about all of this? *God, what if they were living here ?*

Tony swallowed and blinked. Blinked again. Steeled himself for what he was about to do.

"Drop me in."

He didn't know what to expect, so when he crashed through the dirty glass of the warehouse and saw dust and dirt, Tony wasn't sure if he could say he was disappointed. It was as if nobody had been here in years. Everything was coated in a layer of disgustingness, FRIDAY scanning the area. Nothing looked touched.

So why was Peter's tracker here?

"Boss..." FRIDAY started, finding something in her scans. "The signal ends twenty six feet away, in the far left corner."

Tony turned, expecting to see a scared teenager. Hell, maybe even a sleeping aunt. The lights of his suit turned on, however, to reveal... Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Just an area that was less dusty than everywhere else. A simple broken table, a spot on the floor in the rough formation of a circle messed with. Like something was resting there for a while before being disturbed.

And upon closer inspection, a tiny white line.

Squinting, Tony made his way over. The sound of the metal footsteps reverberated throughout the entire area, surely alerting any potential rats of his presence. And with every step, realization dawned on him. Delivered as a cold, hard, wire with encoding information, sending signals to alert Tony where Peter would be when he was in his Spider suit.

The reason Karen told them about the tracker was because it wasn't in the suit anymore.

It was laying in front of Tony, crumpled up and mocking him.

Weirdly enough, Tony forgot how to breathe.

He fell to his knees, defeat empowering him. That hope that he foolishly let grow in his chest now felt like lead, weighing him down. The air was too heavy, the knowledge was too much.

His stars were dying, and the infinite darkness was eating him alive.

FRIDAY tried talking to him, but it didn't matter.

Tony couldn't hear her over his own sobs.

...He didn't know why he still tried.

The numbness had taken over once more, lasting throughout the entire ride back to the tower. Seared itself into his bones as FRIDAY suggested calling someone. Demanding his attention when he put her on mute.

Tony didn't think, and he didn't feel.

It seems like anytime he tries, he gets crushed.

He looks up May's last known address. He doesn't process why. It didn't matter.

It was the same apartment as before.

There was no Iron Man suit there to transport him. In its place, his self driving car. He couldn't trust himself to drive; not with how badly his hands shook and with how spacious his usually exuberant mind was.

His eyes were dry and his throat hoarse, but it didn't matter. It would heal, and it would just happen again.

Tony wasn't in his body anymore. His stars expanded throughout the small space of the car, windows tinting with the ink of his soul. No comets flew in his expanse. He was stuck on a bird shaped ship with no oxygen, his last wits dying off with the thought of things getting better.

He didn't remember the car parking. He didn't remember stepping out, making his way into the lobby. He was only aware that he was in front of the door to the Parker's apartment.

There was a note on the door, but he didn't read it.

He didn't care.

It didn't matter.

The door creaked open, and if he were in the right state of mind he probably would've cracked a joke about how ominous that was. But of course, he wasn't. So he didn't.

And just as the air in the warehouse was, the apartment was layered with a fine layer of dust. Little specks seemed to shine where they floated in the ray of dim light, not landing on any solid surface.

Tony didn't even feel surprise when he saw there wasn't a solid surface for it to land on.

Of course, there was the floor. But it was barren, the only weight pressing onto it being Tony's and the kitchen appliances that were mandatory for the apartment. He took a step in and left a print, hands shaking by his sides.

He probably looked like a moron.

But it didn't matter.

Every room was like the last; barren. He floated through like a ghost on a path that was predestined for them to follow. A shell of a man who couldn't comprehend that his last bit of happiness was gone and he had no idea what to do. Where to find him. *How* to find him.

The tracker in his suit pocket felt like it was searing a space in his chest where his heart would be.

Nothing was here anymore.

He traveled back to the living room somehow, managing to stand on his unsteady legs. The door creaked some more, and he didn't turn around.

"Excuse me, sir? Do you.. Are you living here?"

Tony swallowed. Looked out the window peering through Queens, saw the tower in the distance. Tried not to picture what Peter looked like when he was growing up in this small area, seeing him bouncing on the couch that used to be right where he stood.

"No, I'm not." Tony somehow got out. His voice didn't sound like his own, he noted. Maybe it was because of his hoarse throat. Or maybe because his ears felt clogged up with the echoes of lost memories that he didn't know even existed fuddled into his messed up mind.

Maybe he was just tired.

"Okay..." The lady drawled on. Tony gave her credit for not hightailing it out of here. Telling the landlord. Hell, even calling the cops. He probably looked crazy. And maybe he was. "Would you like me to close the door?"

His legs gave out.

But instead of falling haphazardly like he imagined, he willingly released his weight. Sat down, criss crossed, facing away from the stranger. Continuing to look out the sunset of outside, He

sighed. Watched as his galaxy became something he didn't want to be apart of. Not anymore. Not without the boy who somehow wrapped Tony around his finger without realizing it.

“It doesn't matter.”

He closed his eyes.

And for the first time in a while, Tony felt something more than numbness.

Iron Man felt loss.

Chapter End Notes

uwu tell me what you think in the comments!

also i'm napping for an oblivion after this.

(not really, i'm only gonna go on break for like a day or two before I start with the eighth chapter lmao)

Peace in Your Violence

Chapter Summary

"I couldn't tell you before, and I can't tell you now. I'm sorry..."

Chapter Notes

A door slowly creaks open.

Two pale hands extend to set down the really late chapter.

They retreat, and the door shuts once again. But not before a scraggy voice comes through.

"From the bottom of my heart,

my bad."

But in all seriousness, thank you to my wonderful beta Cass for helping get this chapter out! They helped revise, edit, and even wrote a scene for me :) Without the tremendous help, I have no idea when this would come out and even if it would be any good.

Next chapter is more of a filler to lead to the biggest scene yet, so it'll be out sooner!

But without further ado, here's the long-awaited chapter eight!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Peter thought the sky was brighter. There were more fuzzy animals outside, and less criminals to apprehend. When swinging from his webs, he felt lighter than ever. Karen seemed chipper, and the civilians around Hell's Kitchen appreciated his presence. Some even cracked a few jokes with him while he was on the ground, and a nice couple bought him lunch.

Everything seemed better now that he was emancipated.

Of course he knew that it was all in his mind. Things were the same; he was just noticing things more. The heaviness that had clouded his mind was gone, his very bones cleansed from the darkness that gripped him for months.

When he and Matt went back to the apartment, Karen and Foggy were already there. Both of them were wearing party hats with huge smiles on their faces, each holding a tiny cake. "Surprise!" They both yelled, Foggy pulling out a whistle from his pocket and blowing into it. Matt flinched, but

chuckled at his friends antics.

Peter started crying happily for the second time that day.

While stuffing his face with cake and thinking about swinging around, Foggy had asked him about school. “Now that you’re emancipated, are you going to go back to highschool? Seems like it’d be a waste to just drop out of the game because you legally can now.”

Karen turned to give him a curious glance, and he swallowed the chewed up food in his mouth. Foggy was right, of course. It’d be a waste to just wait to enroll and get his GED. It would not only look bad on college applications, and *oh God, college...*

Peter had shrugged his shoulders and opted for the easy answer. “I haven’t really thought about it. This was all just a few hours ago, you know?”

And that was the end of that.

But now, with Spiderman sitting on the ledge of an apartment waiting for something to happen, he realized that while the conversation may have been over in the group, it never really ended with him.

Midtown was a prestigious school. You either had to be smarter than smart or richer than rich to get in. And of course, Peter humbly only falls into one category. But when he was enrolled, he was on a full-paid scholarship. With him leaving for so long, would he even be considered a student anymore? Or would he have to go through the entire process once more, just so he can finish his junior and senior year of school?

...But that was another thing.

If he really wanted to, he could graduate this year. Do the test and skip senior year. He’s been told by all of his teachers that he was smart enough, and that he shouldn’t be wasting his time still in high school when he could just jump into college; and maybe even graduate early there, too. But each and every time, he would simply answer “I have friends here. It would suck if I just left them.”

But that was when he had Ned to gush about Star Wars in his ear, and when he had MJ to flick him on his forehead for missing a decathlon meeting.

It'd be like a different reality if he went back and saw them in the hallways without him. Granted, there was a short period of time before... *she* died, that he'd grown accustomed to it. But now? His mind has regressed back to a time where he would seek out Ned in the crowd, and he knows that he wouldn't be there.

Maybe it'd hurt too much.

Spiderman grumbled and tried to rub his masked face, before whipping out his phone to get started on his newest article about the law firm while he waited for Karen to pick up on any activity.

Unsurprisingly, Matt didn't mention the sudden pile of items in the corner of the living room. Peter still technically had yet to ask the man if it was okay that his stuff was even here in the first place and if he could move it from that general area, but yet neither decided to say anything about it. Probably waiting on the other person to speak up.

Which is why Peter found it both a Godsend and an embarrassingly awkward moment when Foggy came by and blurted upon first seeing the tiny mountain "are you planning on moving that any time soon?"

He was sure that if he was drinking anything in that moment, it would've gone everywhere in front of him.

Matt just cocked his head to the side, however. As if wondering the same thing. Ever so hesitantly, Peter turned towards the man and asked hesitantly, "If... If I'm allowed to?"

The blonde looked between his best friend and newly acquired friend, before realization dawned on his face. "Matt, you asshole!" He screeched, grabbing the newspaper on the counter. Matt looked startled, taking off his glasses to look in the general direction of Foggy.

And if anyone told Peter that Daredevil got whacked in the face with a rolled up newspaper and yelled? He probably would've laughed at you and given you a high five. But there he was, standing in the living room when it happened.

He bursted out into laughter, receiving a semi-dark look from Matt while Foggy continued his tirade of blows to different parts of his body, each word spoken accentuated with a *whack!*

“You-” *whack!* “Should’ve-” *whack!* “Told-” *whack!* “Him-” *whack!* “You-” *whack!* “Absolute-” *whack!* “Mongoose!” *whackwhackwhack!*

With the last hit, Peter was leaning on the counter and clutching his side. He hadn’t laughed this hard in ages, and the warmth in his chest grew with the sudden realization that things hadn’t been good enough for him to laugh like this in a long time. Matt sighed and hung his head in mock humiliation, cheeks tinted a slight pink. Foggy just threw the newspaper back in the general direction of the counter, narrowly missing the teenager.

Eventually Peter calmed down, fake wiping a tear from his eye. The earlier question he asked had alluded his mind for those few moments, but came rearing back when Matt shrugged and answered “I figured he would’ve done it by now.” He pointed a finger at the shell shocked teen before turning it towards Foggy in a scrutinizing manner. “And a newspaper? Really?”

The teen blanched, looking between the two men quickly. “You- I mean- what?” Foggy snorted, while Matt gained a fond smile on his face. Peter’s brain did a manual shut down and reboot, windows xp theme helpfully resurfacing from his subconscious as a sort of joke to himself.

Matt brought his hands to straighten his tie that got knocked with the newspaper, simply answering “I figured you would’ve made yourself at home without my explicit permission. You’re always welcome here, and as far as I can tell, you haven’t even gotten your first bit of royalties for your work and we haven’t paid you yet.” Foggy took that moment to jump in the conversation, finger jutting in the air silencing Peter’s comeback. “Speaking of paying! We need to get down to the firm. Pete, you coming? There could be some interesting shots you can take.”

Gathering his scrambled thoughts, the teen just nodded quickly. They all started heading towards the door, before Peter made an abrupt stop. “I’ll, uh, I’ll websling there. Gotta talk to Karen and ask for updates on things, yeah? I’ll catch you guys there!” The duo just nodded in confirmation, Foggy grumbling something about how he wished he could avoid the streets by swinging and how it’d be faster.

He stood at the door for a few minutes, listening to the slowly fading heartbeats of his two friends. Once they were far enough for the gentle thumps to sound like raindrops hitting tree leaves, Peter turned towards his small corner of the living room. His suit was hidden somewhat nicely between the small bit of clothes he had, only the gloves sticking out.

Without wasting another second, Peter vaulted from his previously still position and flew across the couch, flipping in the air and landing across the room in front of his possessions. He smiled triumphantly at himself for the little show of his acrobatic skills, before pushing the items away from his suit.

His fingers stilled and his smile wavered as he brushed up against his MIT hoodie. Slowly, he felt the curves of the wrinkles, mind going daringly blank. Any rush he may have felt was gone, spider suit no longer in his peripherals. He had tunnel vision for the hoodie, the one that he took from Tony.

He remembered the day like it was yesterday. Peter was patrolling as Spiderman, when Karen alerted him that there was conflict brewing Upstate. Naturally, he followed the path lit up in the direction of said trouble. And when he got there, he was met with giant mutated mole rats climbing the buildings like they weren't breaking the laws of gravity.

"Yeesh, I'm having flashbacks to that one movie, the one with Godzilla." Spiderman said mostly to himself, aiming for one of the creatures and shooting a web towards it. The mole turned and *screeched* at him, causing a yelp to come out of Spiderman's mouth. Instinctively his hands went to cover his sensitive ears, the strand of web that he was previously swinging on flying away without his added weight.

The ground came quick, his eyes widening with the realization of his mistake. "Oh, shi-!" He cried out, bracing himself for impact. Within the .2 seconds he had to accept that there wasn't any saving himself and that he was about to have to fight these overgrown rodents with possibly some cracked or bruised ribs along with other painful body contusions, a metal arm came out of nowhere and gripped his hand, flying towards the sky and away from the concrete.

Relief washed over his bones even when his eyes were still glued shut. "Kid," a voice broke through the sound of wind whipping against his mask, causing his eyes to bulge out of his head. "If I would've come down to fight these ugly rats that rival the looks of Tom Magee and found a spider soufflé, I wouldn't be very happy. Try not to let that happen again, webhead. Now, look alive!"

Before Spiderman could get a word out to Tony, his hand that was being gripped by the iron suit was tugged harshly upwards, sending him flying high above the other man. Letting out something that sounded suspiciously like a scream, Spiderman flailed in the air for a few seconds before gathering his bearings, watching Iron Man add more power to his repulsors to fly away faster.

A web shot from his shooter, securing on a building and sending him swinging to the mole rats

once more.

The entire fight took about an hour to finally calm down, and another half hour to wait on SHIELD to come take care of the left over bodies that were now littering the streets. Spiderman sat on one of the nearby rooftops, watching over everything. There was already one of Stark's teams of men to take care of the property damage, a few stray Iron Man suits grabbing materials from the trucks and flying them to the side of the buildings.

He was about to head home so he could nurture his sore muscles and bleeding side, courtesy of the one scary moment when he was surrounded and one of the creepy things got in a good scratch straight over his ribs and extending to his back.

Key part, was that he was *about* to.

When he stood up and bit his tongue to hide the groan of pain, an Iron Man suit flew next to him out of nowhere. "And where do you think you're going, pipsqueak?" Spiderman turned to the suit, noticing a bit of caked blood from one of the mole rats. *Tony was in this one.* He sighed and jutted his thumb out to point behind him, answering "home, dude. This isn't gonna heal quickly without copious amounts of food, a long night of sleep, and possibly extra ice cream to help me deal with the onslaught of pain that i'm about to succumb to."

The mask of the Iron Man suit flew up, showing Tony looking at him. His eyebrows were slightly raised and scrunched, lines appearing in the middle of his face. Chocolate colored eyes were wide with disbelief, lips parted in mild shock. "Uh, no. Try again." he said, staring directly into the white lenses of the spider mask.

Underneath it, Peter was shooting Tony his own confused gaze. "Okay... I'm going to go chase a cat named Figgy for stealing my hotdog earlier. He kinda looks like a pumpkin, and should be on a diet, which is why it's such an offense to me. Plus! My hotdog!"

He received an unimpressed glare for his witty remark. Deciding it wasn't worth it, he just turned and muttered out "he better sleep with one eye open tonight, because I'm gonna be Figgy hunting till I get my revenge." His side twinged with pain with every movement, causing him to unconsciously ball his hands into fists. And of course, Tony noticed the movement.

"Alright kid, I'll just tell you. I'm taking you to the tower, we're gonna bandage you up, and I'm gonna slip you one of Cap's old pain killers. Not sure if it'd knock you out like it would for him, but we aren't exactly working with much." He snapped the faceplate back down, holding up a finger in warning when Spiderman tried protesting. "And don't try to deny my hospitality. Would

you rather deal with copious amount of pain, or sit in my wonderful tower, hang out with the one and only Tony Stark-- people would kill to be in that position, by the way-- and fix your suit up so that you're good to go tomorrow. Deal?"

Spiderman turned to look at him. *Really* look at him. Here they were, on a rooftop, tired from battle. They both smelt bad and would probably want nothing more than a long shower and a nap. Tony sustained no injuries, and seemed weirdly chipper. He didn't have to be nice to Peter and offer to take care of him. Willingly spend time with a teenager. But yet, he was telling him that that's what was gonna happen.

A small smile etched on Peter's face, pain now only a dull throb in comparison to the warm feeling that bloomed in his chest. He shook his head in mock resignation, sighing and slumping. "Well, if you insist." The eye roll that he got in response was practically radiating through the iron mask, and Peter marked that down as an accomplishment.

He took a step closer to Tony before wincing, blood still oozing slowly from the four lines across his side. Spiderman flushed as bright as his mask, awkwardly asking "so how are you planning on getting me across the city without bleeding out first?"

...It took about five minutes to cross the city, Spiderman climbing on Iron Man's back while they flew. "Jesus christ kid, I've picked up six year olds heavier than you. Do you even eat?" Tony asked, firing his repulsors while trying not to jostle his passenger. Peter just held on tighter, not allowing his body to sway with the wind. "Oh, you have no idea. I could probably eat a truck and still have room for a tiny car."

When they got to the tower, Tony flew straight into the infirmary. "Watch your step, kid," he told Peter as he walked closer to the bed. The latter unstuck himself when they got close enough, sucking in a quick breath as his feet hit the floor. The Iron Man suit retracted and flew away, the billionaire now standing in its place. Feeling overdressed, Peter slowly peeled off his mask, hair sticking to his forehead with sweat. Tony had his back turned to him as he gathered materials, so he went ahead and sat on the bed.

When Tony turned back around, there were subtle stress lines on his face. His hands shook ever so slightly as he gripped the bandages in one hand, a small bottle of pills in the other. And in those few seconds Peter realized something. He wasn't just here to get patched up, he was here because Tony was worried and wanted to make sure he was okay.

The thought made Peter's insides feel fuzzy, like they did when Ben did something particularly fatherly.

“Alright kiddo, I’m gonna need the suit. Repairs and stuff, the works. Also it’d be counterproductive to wrap this around you and the material.” Tony joked, hands going in the universal shrug gesture. Peter met his eyes with a confused look, hoping that the pain he was in wasn’t obvious on his face. “I.. Don’t have anything else to wear.”

As if realizing this for the first time, Tony shook his head at himself. “Right, right. This was kind of impromptu.” He brought his hand to his face and massaged his eyes with his pointer and thumb before making a wiping gesture. “Alright, stay here. I’ll run upstairs and see if I have anything your size.”

While Tony was gone, Peter took the time to peel off the top portion of his suit. He hissed openly at the sting from the dried blood clinging onto the suit that tugged at his skin, counting to three before ripping it all off like a bandaid. “Jesus *christ!* ” He whisper yelled, eyes widening at the sudden burst of fire-like pain. He now had an open view of the complete damage on his side, and was only mildly happy to see that the long gashes had at least stopped bleeding.

“Yeesh, kid. That overgrown ball sack really got one of ya, didn’t he?” Tony joked, walking in with a hoodie and sweatpants draped over his arm. Peter’s face morphed into one of disgust, suddenly very much regretting his decision to stay. But he noticed how Tony’s heartbeat slowly accelerated with each passing look at his torso, a clear indication that his indifferent aura was fake.

With gentle hands, Tony slowly started tending to Peter’s side. With each wince, he would apologize. Every sharp intake of breath, he would look torn for a fraction of a second before steeling his expression. Peter tried not to show so many signs of distress, but sometimes his body would betray him and his arms would tense up with anticipation unconsciously.

Soon enough, Tony wrapped the gauze around his chest to stretch over the wound, adding bandages to wrap completely over his torso. “There, all better,” he mainly said to himself, taking a step back to get a better look at his handy work. Peter let out a sigh of relief, shoulders slumping. He could feel his super healing working overtime to try to heal everything, making him slightly tired. “Thanks, man.” He looked at the hoodie and sweats, before glancing at the spandex that still covered his lower half. “Mind turning around or something so I can change?”

Tony, stuck in his thoughts, snapped back with a small jolt. He looked panicked before landing on the clothes, expression changing into one of understanding.

Peter couldn’t stop replaying that sheer look of panic and how it was directed towards him. Why was Tony looking at him like that..?

“Yeah, kid. I’ll go get started on food. You like spaghetti? Mom’s recipe, of course.” Tony asked, already walking out the door. Peter tried not to dwell on the expression too much, deciding that it’d be better to do when he was alone and could ponder. He unfolded the hoodie, awkwardly fumbling around as to not move his torso too much. “Love it. Even if I didn’t, I’d still eat it. Like you said, people would kill for this opportu--”

Peter cut himself off, taking a small whiff of the hoodie as he started putting it over his head. The smell was undoubtedly Tony, years of ownership getting the smell of coffee, oil, and Malibu’s ocean air seared into the very stitches of the material. The scent reminded Peter of a memory long forgotten, only appearing at the reminder. But no matter how much he tried, he just couldn’t grasp the exact image his mind was trying to retrieve.

He must’ve taken too long to pick up his sentence, because Tony turned around with a concerned look on his face. Face flushing, Peter pulled the rest of the hoodie over his sore body, appreciating how the actual hoodie was his size but the sleeves covered his hands. “Sorry, lost track of my sentence,” he tried to mend, desperately hoping that Tony didn’t call him out for his childish brain playing hard-to-get with the warm feeling associated with the smell of the older man.

Tony’s face softened, however. With a small smile, he started turning around to head to the kitchen and give Peter privacy to change into his sweats. “You can keep that hoodie, by the way. It’s been well used and served its purpose for me many nights, now it’s time to pass it on to the future grad at MIT.”

And then he was gone, leaving Peter reeling at the implications of him being a student at MIT, the same college Tony had gone to. A smile of his own stretched across his face, a huff of a laugh and a head shake following.

Damn Tony and his subtle nods to the future.

“Sir, if I may intrude, but Boss has insisted that you hurry so that he can eat and shower.” FRIDAY’s voice played throughout the room, startling Peter. If she watched him jump at the sound of her melodic voice, (which he’s sure she did) she didn’t comment. He rolled his eyes before starting to undress his lower half, shooting back “yeah yeah, tell the old fart that I’ll be there before the noodles can finish.”

...And now, with the faded print of the MIT hoodie clutched in his hands, Peter knew what the smell reminded him of.

It reminded him of a time when he was still too young to talk, babbling being the only thing he could do. Warm, calloused hands holding him, rocking him, singing him to sleep. A deep baritone voice that calmed his tiny baby mind, letting him know that he was safe in the arms of this man.

Then, of another time, more prominent and pronounced. Hearty laughs and late nights of work. Peter curled up in his arms with his aunt next to him, crying about a family he had lost. The light cologne that was still in some of his clothing to this day.

The smell that was still somehow in the college hoodie reminded Peter of men that he'd grown close to; men who he had loved. It reminded him of his father, his pseudo-father, and now Tony. His almost pseudo-father.

The panic that filtered through Tony's gaze that night made more sense now than it did before.

Peter had known about Howard Stark's presence in Tony's life. He knew he was a horrible man and an even worse father. There had been nights where his mark would still shine clearly on his son, Peter's perceptive eyes catching each and every time he would suddenly flinch or stare at something for too long.

At first, it was hard to distinguish the trauma his father left on Tony from other trauma inflicted upon him throughout the years. And for a long while, that absolutely killed Peter.

He didn't have to actually hear the words "I'm too scared to get close to you, because I don't want to be like my father" to know that they were implied. And he knew that's why Tony had cut him out of his life as if he was just a weed in a pot of flowers. He knew it, but it still hurt like hell.

Tony may not have known the impact he had on the teenagers life, but Peter did. And he knew the impact of him leaving.

So for him to be getting emotional over a stupid hoodie, followed by a stupid memory, brought on by a stupid smell that triggered something in his deep Was easily put as he previously described. Stupid.

But even as Peter shook his head and pursed his lips, he couldn't look away from the hoodie. A few moments later, though, he reminded himself that he had somewhere to be. He gently moved the old thing to the side in favor of his costume, until he was suddenly bombarded with the conversation Foggy brought up earlier.

Seems like it'd be a waste to just drop out of the game because you legally can now.

He knew Foggy was right. Of course he did, it'd be stupid of him if he didn't. But yet, for some odd reason, he couldn't convince himself to make the final call. It wasn't because he was tired from fighting for his freedom so long, or even because he just didn't want to.

Something was holding his tongue back, clawing at his airway. Something dark and foreboding that just wouldn't allow him to say that he wanted to go back to Midtown.

But of course, instead of dwelling on the matter like he so desperately needed to do, Peter absentmindedly slipped out of his clothing and changed into his spandex suit, folding the more professional clothing and putting them in a backpack.

Maybe another time, he told himself as he threw his mask on and greeted Karen.

The entire way to the firm, Peter thought about his future. How it's changed, where he's going from now on, what may happen that'll deter him. And of course, he separately imagines Spiderman's future. Where his new patrol route would be, if he would team up with Daredevil more often, and even if he would ever cease to exist.

Of course, that one was a no brainer.

Karen (the blonde one, not his AI) was in the office before Matt and Foggy, shooting a warm smile at him as he ran in with crinkled clothes. "Foggy texted, said they got stuck in traffic. Pretty sure Matt convinced him to just pay the driver and walk the rest of the way, though." She informed him, shuffling papers on her desk.

Peter smiled in lieu of a greeting, shooting back "alright!" before smoothing out his clothes to the best of his ability. He tossed his spider suit filled backpack in the general direction of Matt's office door, mind already wandering back to his former friends. Karen shot him a look, before turning and making some of her coffee. Decidedly, it smelt bad.

It wasn't until the duo got into the office and set up their stations, with Peter not even coherent enough to realize that they were there, did Karen intervene.

"Hey," she started, putting a light hand on his shoulder. Peter jumped in surprise, whipping around quickly and latching onto her wrist. Luckily he didn't apply too much pressure, or else his super strength may have caused some serious damage. Karen showed no outward response to his actions, but her heart accelerated ever so slightly. She took a deep breath and plastered a smile on her pale face, before jerking her head in the general direction of her area. "Can we talk?"

Peter didn't question why they couldn't talk where they were, but he chalked it up to the fact that her cup filled with fresh, liquidized energy was still on her desk.

When they made their way over, Karen patted the chair in a soft way of telling the teen to take a seat. Not feeling any reason not to, he complied. "So," she started, sending him an even glare. "Penny for your thoughts?"

Oh.

Peter slumped in the chair, bringing his hands up to rub his face. "Is it really that obvious?" he asks with a groan. She just rolled her eyes playfully before shooting back "I'm a journalist. I see, and I know."

"Pretty sure you're saying the quote wrong."

"Pretty sure it's not a direct quote if it's wrong."

A smile broke on Peter's face. "Touché."

Karen huffed in approval, before schooling her expression once more. "No more distractions, I was being serious earlier. What's eating at you? You didn't notice that Matt and Foggy walked in, and missed the part where Foggy almost tripped in his haste to get to the last bagel." She stopped, before realization flashed behind her eyes. "Is this about the school comment Foggy made earlier?"

And just like that, Peter was fucked.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the aforementioned man try to step in the room to ask one of them a question. Right as he got to the door to knock and announce his presence, however, Matt appeared out of nowhere and grabbed his arm. He got up close to the blonde and whispered something in his ear, Foggy's eyes widening before backing away. Peter realized that Matt would hear whatever they were talking about, and knew it was private.

That at least was a little comforting.

Karen drew his attention back to the present by placing a comforting hand on his shoulder once more, crouching so that she wasn't towering over him anymore. He looked into her bright blue eyes, and something broke inside of him. Like a water dam ready to burst, emotions flowered from deep within and painted a canvas across his mood, sending him through a series of attitudes in the span of a few seconds.

"It's just.." he started, before sighing and putting his head in his hands. Why was talking so hard? Logically he knew that he was being irrational; he could trust Karen. So why couldn't he find the right words and form them into a coherent sentence, once that conveyed how he was feeling?

He thought of how well spoken MJ is, and how she never stuttered. Never uttered anything she didn't want to. Her unwavering voice, and how he only finds that confidence when he's out as Spiderman fighting criminals.

He thought of how Ned could babble for hours about something he was excited about. How they used to spend hours on the phone late at night with Ned just talking to him about anything and everything while Peter sat curled on his bed, despair crippling him but the soft sentences from the receiver lulling him into a sense of security.

He thought about how unbelievably happy May and Ben were when he showed them the letter from Midtown stating that he gained a high enough score to be enrolled in the school on a full ride. How Tony would always bring up his future at MIT and how he would always find a way to praise Peter for his grades and class rank, despite missing so many classes for crimes.

Peter steeled himself and ran his hands through his hair, before opening his mouth to tell Karen about all of this.

"I miss my friends." He started, drawing in his confidence as the webslinger. "And I miss school. I miss learning, so *so* much. I miss the proud feeling I got when impressing with my grades, and I

miss that dummy Flash.”

Karen looked at him, but didn't say anything. She knew he wasn't done yet.

“But I don't have any of that anymore. My friends are gone and all I have left is you guys. I'm not enrolled in school anymore after being gone for so long, and I won't learn because I know essentially everything they're teaching.” He pauses, then adds “I'm super smart, not super cocky.”

That garnered a laugh from the blonde, so Peter gave her a few seconds before continuing. “I can't make my aunt or uncle proud for obvious reasons, and I can't even picture seeing Mr. Stark's smile and huff of laughter when he hears about my grades.”

He slumped in his chair, feeling defeated by himself. He felt Karen's eyes on him and for a moment mourned the loss of the heat produced by her hand on his shoulder. “What about Flash?” She quietly asked. A random burst of giggles broke through Peter's chest, shaking his entire body. Karen shot him a confused look in a way to ask ‘*what's so funny?*’

“Flash is a dick. Bullied me, but it was fine. Better me than anyone else, right? Now I just want to show up and deck him just for funsies. May even do it in costume, just to get that satisfaction.” A look flashed (ha, Peter was proud of that one) across Karen's face, hiding before he could successfully depict its meaning. “I see,” she stated ominously, nodding as if making a final declaration.

Before Peter could ask her to elaborate on her sudden epiphany however, she got up and crossed the room in a few short strides, grabbing a notebook and dragging a chair back to her earlier position. His eyebrow quirked up in interest, leaning a bit towards her. She uncapped a pen strewn across her desk and flipped to the first clean sheet she could find, quickly scribbling down random equations.

“Um.. Not to sound annoying or anything, but what are you doing?” Peter asked, stressing the end of the sentence. “Hold on” she told him, not breaking eye contact with her writing. With nothing else to do, Peter just sat and sighed, looking towards the other room where Matt and Foggy were talking to a client. When did she even get here?

Before he could dwell on the answer, however, Karen shoved the notebook in his direction with finality. Peter startled and grabbed it by instinct, wrinkling the top and bottom sheets. He shot her an apologetic smile, before it registered what the paper had said.

Pros of high school:

- Education
- Leads to college
- See friends
- Keep level of balance
- Scholarships and grants
- Return to old ways
- Won't need to get a GED
- Graduate early if wanted/needed

Cons of high school:

- Too smart
- Won't learn anything
- Bully
- Get distracted by old friends
- Farther away from home
- Cut into Spiderman time

"Feel free to add anything that I may have missed," Karen's voice broke through his reading. Peter looked between her and the list a few times, before gently setting it down with numb fingers. He swallowed and then blinked, shaking his head. "I'm pretty sure that covers it."

Satisfied with her work, Karen smiles before turning to him. "You see, Peter, in the long run? You're gonna have to go to school either way. And although it may seem like a punishment for an emancipated teenager, you still have a life to live. What happened in your past is what sets the line for your future, and dare I say that your future is sure to be bright with all the darkness clouding your sight."

Not everything is going to be easy. You'll see your friends in the hallway and wonder why they ever left. There'll be a section of the school you have to avoid because of haunting memories. Hell, I'll be honest with you. There's a chance that you'll realize you're too good for staying in school and just opt for taking the test and graduating early. Whether or not you choose to do this now while you're still young and fresh or old and brittle is your choice.

Whatever you choose, though. Just know that Matt, Foggy and I will be here to support you. We're your friends too, and we aren't planning on changing that. And your old friends are crazy for not doing the same."

There was clapping in the other office when Karen finished, Foggy suspiciously looking in their

direction while Matt whacks him with his cane. The client stood awkwardly watching the duo, unsure as to what was happening.

Peter blinked and was mildly aware of the fact that there was liquid going down his face. Karen implored him with her light eyes, flickering back and forth between his. Unable to stop himself, he jumped out of his chair and crashed into her, pulling her into a tight hug. Karen let out a sound of surprise and delight before she wrapped her arms under his, holding his chest while he burrowed into her neck.

“Thank you,” he whispered into her hair. “Thank you so much.”

Karen didn’t respond, but instead held him tighter.

The next few days flew by quickly.

Spiderman was out with the sun, and Daredevil was out with the moon.

He was everywhere; Upstate, in Hell’s Kitchen, Queens, and all in the between. Spiderman fought harder foes. Mutants, aliens, and even the occasional cyclops that seemed to be showing up more recently.

He inflicted more damage than he received. Dodged quicker. Calculated his steps precisely and executed them flawlessly, fighting technique becoming more refined. It looked like he was dancing to a song not yet written with how elegant Spiderman contorted, his body dodging, shooting out webs to capture the assailant.

Even though it had been less than two weeks, the physical difference with his new pattern was noticeable. His limbs weren’t so scrawny and seemingly uncoordinated anymore. Slowly the muscles that he lost in the previous months were coming back, and accompanying it an unexpected growth spurt.

(Foggy called him crazy when he bumbled in the office screeching about how he somehow gained two inches. Karen just ruffled his hair affectionately.)

News articles and stories were being printed and handed out more lately. They were all talking about one main thing: Spiderman's recovery, and what happened to the local vigilante?

There were many theories. He got married. Managed to find another job that took his time up. One even connected him to the Avengers and said that he was secretly training with them.

None of them could ever come close to predicting what actually happened to Spiderman, and Peter was okay with that. It was his story of tragedy and loss, and it was his to tell.

Not that anyone had asked.

Peter wanted to tell Matt about his decision to go back to school, but Matt seemed to be less present with the days. Of course, Peter couldn't blame him. He lived and worked with him, afterall. He knew that piles upon piles of cases have been loaded onto him with the release of Wilson Fisk and he's been working himself to the bone both as Matt Murdock and Daredevil to get justice.

"Don't worry about it," Daredevil growled at Spiderman at 2AM on the top of a ledge that should be near impossible for the regular person to climb. It was clear that this was one of Daredevil's perching spots by the dried up bloody hand prints made on the old concrete. "You wouldn't be able to help either way, kid."

Spiderman knew that Daredevil was listening to his heartbeat accelerate, just as he had been doing ever since he backflipped behind the Devil a few moments prior.

He could also hear the grating of bones against each other, sounding like twenty chalkboards all amplified by microphones. Rather than face the potential wrath of the devil and face the awkwardness followed by seeing Matt at home in a few hours, Peter chose not to mention it. Or the obvious pain he was trying to hide.

So he stepped away and let Daredevil do his thing. It was fine, because in the end he knew that Matt was right. While he was working his way up the chain of powerful enemies, there were still some that he wasn't prepared for.

One day, however, Peter couldn't wait anymore. Even if Matt was currently laying in his bed broken and beaten after finally bringing relative peace back to Hell's kitchen. He was barely forming coherent sentences with the amount of pain medication he was on, yet somehow he was

still going on about the work he needed to do tomorrow because there was a court hearing coming up and he *needed* to be there.

Foggy and Karen were on their way to come help the floundering teenager, much to his relief. It was one thing to take care of himself when he was in a similar state. Someone with senses amped up to 200 while his were a mere 125 at best? One word: scary.

Matt was trying to get up despite the stab wound in his side and the four broken ribs (along with countless other injuries that made Peter queasy just thinking about) so making a last minute choice, he blurted out “I want to go to school.”

The reaction was instantaneous.

All movements ceased in the room. Peter squeezed the wet rag in his hands while Matt did the same with the sheets between his fingers. The former swallowed before risking a look at the battered man in front of him, before averting his eyes. (It didn’t occur to him that eye contact didn’t really matter until a few seconds later, but by then it was too late for him to care.) He opened his mouth to backpedal, before he realized he had absolutely no idea how to.

Matt cocked his head, wincing at how the movement pulled at some of his contusions. The simple movement effectively stopped anything Peter had planned.

“And... Is this,” he bobbed his head a little, raising his eyebrows and further exposing his black eye, “decision? Is this like, spur of the...” he trailed off, already catching the wave that his medication brought on. Peter filled in the blanks however, and answered anyways. “Well, I’ve been thinking about it ever since Foggy brought it up almost a month ago, and I’ve been sure of my answer. And then we were both busy, which is completely fine, but- ..Matt?”

The man in question had somehow managed to lay down and completely pass out in the span of fifteen seconds, looking bare and open for anyone to see. His lips were slightly parted, all signs of stress gone from his (admittedly handsome) face.

A smile danced across Peter’s face, and he quietly left the room to let the man rest. Shortly after there was a knock at the door, and he let in Karen and Foggy.

“Don’t worry. He’s passed out.” Peter told them, watching their shoulders hunch with the decrease of anxiety. Karen shrugged off her jacket and put it on the coat rack, Foggy following shortly after.

“Thank you for calling us, seriously.” Foggy told him earnestly. The amount of appreciativeness in his eyes and voice was almost staggering, his gaze sending a swarm of emotions swirling through Peter’s chest. “It’s always scary to see what happens to him on tv, but to not know and then have him show up to work like nothing is wrong?” He shakes his head as Karen puts a comforting hand on his shoulder. Foggy blows out a puff of air, before looking back at the teen. “Just... Thank you.”

... Karen and Foggy end up staying, keeping Peter company as he sorts through the many photos he’s taken this week and worked on helping him find the best one to go with his newest update.

“I need your birth certificate, record of immunizations, and anyone you want on your emergency contact list. Proof of residency and an application I already have.”

Peter shot Matt a stupid look.

“ *What.* ”

It had been only two weeks since the night Peter told a relatively high Matt about his wishes. Things had calmed down since then, and things at the firm have been slow pace as of yesterday. All of the hearings had been a success, and all of the contributions from Peter’s articles have really helped. More and more people were becoming interested in what he had to write, which meant more people were sharing his links and spreading awareness for Nelson and Murdock.

Spiderman was still on the incline.

(Peter still swore that he was growing in more than muscle mass.)

Matt turned towards him, somehow managing to look judgemental through his red tinted glasses. “You heard me. You want to be enrolled in Midtown once more, right? Or was I just having delusions?”

Realization hit Peter like a bag of bricks straight to the face. “Oh. *Oh!* You remembered!” He chittered excitedly, rocking back and forth from his perch on Matt’s unusually clean desk. The brunette scoffed from his position in front of the door, cocking his hip to the side and throwing the bottom half of his suit behind his back so that he could put his hands on his hips. “Of course I did. For the few seconds that I remember, it sounded like this was really important to you. Which I completely agree with by the way. Now, do you have those documents? We’ll need them in order to get you back in the school system.”

He thought about the documents and what they would look like, shortly after connecting the dots with the small pile of important papers he grabbed all those months ago. “Yeah, I got them. Unless my mind is playing tricks on me, which would suck. I’m pretty sure they’re tucked in the pocket of one of my pairs of jeans at home.”

It took a few awkward seconds for Peter to realize that he just called Matt’s apartment his home. It had been so long since he subconsciously associated a specific place with that word, giving it a meaning beyond comprehension. In the back of his mind, he imagined May smiling at him for finally finding peace in the violence of reality once more.

But also, he had no idea how Matt would react to him saying that. The man was just standing there with a small smile on his face, not exposing anything. What if Peter saying what he felt about his residence made things complicated?

Backtracking, he waved his hand in a circle. “I mean your home,” he awkwardly amended. Matt tilted his head, before taking a few steps into the office to sit in the seat behind his desk. “It’s as much my home as it is yours, Peter. Now, back pocket, you say?”

As Matt started gliding his hands over a stack of papers printed out in braille, Peter wondered how he was ever self conscious about simple things like wording.

“Midtown tech, this is Mrs. Graves speaking. How may I assist you?”

Matt smiled through the phone receiver, lifting his head and quickly changing to his Lawyer Mode. “Yes, my name is Matt Murdock. I’m calling about student registration?”

There was shuffling over the phone, until the feminine voice cut back on. “I see. You do realize it’s halfway through the school year, correct?” He nodded despite her not being able to see. “I do. But I’m also registering a student who has previously been on campus, up until a few months ago.”

“What’s his name?”

“Peter. Peter Parker.”

Suddenly, it was as if her professional facade fell apart. “Peter?” She asked worriedly. Matt’s smile dropped, head lowering in confusion. “Oh my gosh, is he okay? That boy has been on my mind nearly every day!”

Instead of veering back on track, Matt chose to answer with “He is. How do you know him?”

It sounded like there was something covering Mrs. Graves’s mouth as she spoke, which Matt assumed was her hand. “That boy is something else. Every day he would show up and go out of his way to make me smile. No other student cared as much as he did. When I heard about his aunt, my heart weeped for him. He’s been through so much already, you know? And then he went missing and I had to take him out of the schools registry, and I just couldn’t help but feel guilty.” More rustling, this time like a head shake. “I’m just... I’m so glad to know that he’s okay again.”

Knowing about Peter and his ability to make others fall for him was one thing. Hearing stories from other people and how he tumbled through their lives and wrapped them around his finger, however, that’s something different. It’s amazing to Matt how one kid can leave such an impression, especially to someone who deals with countless other students like him.

Matt had an overwhelming urge to go find the kid and hug him.

Instead, he turned towards the window in his apartment to ‘look’ at the billboard outside. “I’ll tell him about your concerns. I’m sure that it’d make him happy to hear from you.”

“Thank you, Mr. Murdock.” She sighed, before bringing up her professional act once more. “Now, about his re-entry...”

Spiderman was panting on a random rooftop, muscles overexerted from the day.

He had successfully stopped two car chases, one attempted bank robbery, six different muggings, and caught a little girl's runaway bird. *Flyaway* ? He questioned, head tilting to the side to listen to the heartbeat of the city.

The twinge in his shoulder made Peter wince under his mask, adjusting so that his closing bullet graze wasn't strained. When the robber managed to get the shot in, all Peter did was yelp and mutter "oh God, *please don't kill me Matt.*"

Which is why Spiderman was out past two AM despite being spotted around New York throughout the entire day.

(If anyone asked, he would tell them it was just because he wanted to be out.)

(Not that he was scared.)

(Definitely not.)

But with the very quiet steps approaching from behind him, almost inaudible breaths and impossibly slow heartbeat to match, Peter wouldn't deny the way his heart rate sped up.

"I won't kill you, despite *really* wanting to, kid."

Spiderman turned from his position, meeting the dark gaze of Daredevil. The man stood tall and proud, radiating dominance and demanding attention. His shoulders were set in a straight line and his lips were pursed, horns glinting in the wake of the City that Never Sleeps. Daredevil jutted his chin out in the direction of Spiderman's wound, hands clenching at his sides. "I'm giving you exactly twenty seconds to explain why you are out here instead of at home, getting that taken care of."

Twenty seconds was generous.

Peter only needed two.

“I’m not scared!” He blurted out, eyes widening at his own betrayal.

“Uh..” he awkwardly started, face flashing scarlet. Daredevil tilted his head in confusion, no doubt sporting an incredulous expression.

“What the fuck.”

“Don’t judge me!”

Both superheroes said at the same, words rushing together. Spiderman’s eyes widened once more before groaning, throwing his hands in the air and landing on his face. “Let’s just forget about this encounter. Capiche? Capiche.” Before Daredevil had a chance to respond, Peter was already off on his ramble. “You wanna hear about my day? It was super exciting and-”

“Kid.”

“I saved a bird! Weird, right? It’s not everyday that you see me webslinging while furiously screeching at a bird, demanding he slow down-”

“Kid...”

“And you know what? The little girl gave me cookies! More importantly: snickerdoodles! She said her and her friend made them and *Matt*, when I say they tasted heavenly, I *mean* they tasted *heavenly*. And-!”

“ *Kid.* ”

Matt used the voice.

His Daredevil voice.

The one where his baritone voice lowers to a deep and gravelly position, sending vibrations in Peter's chest and rattling every molecule in his body. The one that lights up his spidey sense, making his back go rigid and eyes unfocus. A fear inducing, husky tone that simultaneously turns the area bone chillingly cold but skin seethingly hot at the same time.

Matt called the Devil, and he appeared.

Peter immediately shut up and forgot any type of conversational skills he accumulated throughout the years. Daredevil, upon noticing the absolute distress that filtered through the boy, sighed and went to clip off his helmet.

Spidey took his mask off as well, both of their curly hair flowing freely and crazily. Matt raised his eyebrows and held his hands out in a placating gesture, dark brown eyes looking at Peter but not seeing him. "Now that I have your attention, I have some news to share with you."

At that, the teenagers mood drastically changed. His posture went from a scared rat to an exuberant bunny, hopping on his toes with anticipation. "Ooh, ooh! What is it?" He cooed, walking closer to Matt (who looked severely done with Peter's childish antics, despite his mouth trying to twitch into a smile).

Matt, to his credit, didn't beat around the bush. He held out his arms in an open gesture, helmet gripped with his right hand. "You better work on getting your sleep schedule together, kiddo, because on Monday you'll be on your way to school."

Peter stopped bouncing.

He blinked.

Blinked again.

And then absolutely *lunged* at Matt, clutching his shoulders as if he was turning into dust and needed to be anchored. The older man stumbled backwards with the sudden force barreling

towards him, sending his helmet crashing onto the ground and eyes widening as his body froze. What was happening, and why was Peter draped over him?

It took embarrassingly long for him to realize that Peter was A) hugging him, and B) whispering “thank you, thank you” over and over under his breath, fingers closing around Matt’s Daredevil armor.

Slowly he brought his arms around Peter, rubbing his back slowly. The kid smelled of sweat and adrenaline, but Matt found that he didn’t mind. His senses weren’t going haywire with the extra stimulus, so things were still fine. Peter still hadn’t finished his endless amounts of praise, so Matt just turned his head and rested his cheek on Peter’s curls.

He lost track of how much time they spent there hugging, and how long it took for them to separate and head home.

They went through their nightly routine of showering, eating, and getting ready for bed.

Peter fell asleep curled up to Matt, and Matt couldn’t find any other word to describe how he felt other than content.

After the weekend flew by, Peter would embark on his journey to school once more.

The weekend flew by in a blur of excitement.

Why?

Because Monday needed to come faster.

And why is that?

Because Peter was going back to school once more.

He got caught up with everything in his life so he could focus all of his time on his classes and extracurriculars. That, and his Spidermanning. He had articles lined up and ready to publish, somehow throughout the course of two days managing to get a weeks worth of work done.

Karen congratulated him and told him that some of their writers at her work couldn't even do that.

Peter found himself unable to sit still on Sunday. There was nothing for him to do, everything was covered. So for a while he sat on Matt's bed and tried to watch something on his laptop. And then once he couldn't sit on the bed anymore, he moved to the couch and tried focusing his hearing on certain things in Hell's Kitchen.

His bouncing leg distracted him too much for him to do that for long.

So he went out as Spiderman, and tried to be extra cautious about any bruises or injuries that would land on his face. Karen (his AI (Jesus, that would get confusing eventually)) alerted him of crimes from Brooklyn to Queens, keeping mind of his precautions as well as his decided 'go home or face the wrath of Matt' time.

He flipped, flew, and did cartwheels in the air, amazing the New Yorkers below. Spiderman cracked jokes that had people in tears- Take it as you want it, he's almost positive they were all happy tears and not tears because they hated his quips- and even made a cute little web hammock for these two little kids who asked him nicely at one of the parks he stopped by.

When Peter finally wore himself down, Karen updated him to let him know that he should be heading back just to be safe. It only took about twenty minutes to swing back to their place, so he was there in no time. Matt greeted him from the kitchen by saying "go take a shower, kid. You smell like a well-used gym."

He yanked off his mask and felt his curls sticking to his forehead and grimaced. "Gross" Peter commented, before pressing his spider insignia and feeling the suit deflate around his muscles. Matt smiled and rolled his eyes at the obvious statement, gesturing towards two pizza boxes that were left on the counter.

"Foggy swung by and dropped these off. Pretty sure they were just for you, but I went ahead and helped myself to a slice or two. He told me to tell you good luck tomorrow." A warm feeling

bubbled up in Peter's chest at the message, glee lighting his face up as he practically vibrated over to the boxes. Right as he was reaching in for a slice, however, Matt slapped his hand away and closed the lids.

"Hey, man!" Peter squawked, complete and utter betrayal flooding his veins. He's positive that if he were looking at himself, he'd see what May and Tony dubbed his 'puppy-dog eyes.' Matt just raised an eyebrow, turning and looking in Peter's general direction. "Shower. And in case you've forgotten, your little eye trick won't work on me. Although I can feel it from here- which is astonishing, by the way- I can't see it and refuse to go under."

Ah, so he *was* flashing his puppy-dog eyes.

Nevertheless, he knew Matt was right, so Peter went and showered with little complaint. He decidedly ignored the fact that he was still using Karen's old shampoo and conditioner, telling himself that it was okay because Matt has since bought new bottles of shampoo and conditioner.

Offhandedly, he thought of how nice the sunflower scent smelled.

And then his stomach growled and he remembered that there was rapidly cooling pizza on the counter, so he hurried and scrubbed his head before jumping out and drying off.

After getting dressed in Tony's old MIT hoodie and a pair of pyjama pants, Peter rushed out of the bathroom and went straight to the kitchen. Matt was already dressed in his Daredevil suit, minus the mask. He was still slipping his gloves on when Peter barreled in, grabbing a slice and eating it like he hadn't eaten anything in days. "Oh thank god," he sighed, eyes rolling to the back of his head dramatically. "I thought I was gonna wither away if I waited another millisecond."

Matt just turned to him once more and ruffled his hair, shooting him a "sure you were, kid."

After Peter had his fair share of pizza slices and Matt was in complete garb, they both said their goodnights and went their separate ways. But as Peter's hand hit the soft covers of the bed, he heard Matt call for him. "Yeah?" He responded, knowing that the man wouldn't have a problem with hearing him from across the house.

"Make sure you get enough sleep tonight, you have a big day tomorrow."

Once more, Peter was filled with warmth that only came around when one of the three friends would do something that reminded him of his family. He couldn't stop the smile that spread across his face, or even the warm blush that made itself known across his cheeks and nose. "Yeah yeah, and don't come back black and blue. That'd be awkward to explain!"

He heard Matt huff in lieu of a response, before the door closed.

...The entire night, Peter was plagued with what-if's and what-about's.

What if he sees Ned?

What about MJ?

Or, what if everyone treats him like a fragile case? Giving him pity and treating him differently based on his past year.

Peter sighed and rolled to the other side of the bed, silently wishing sleep came soon.

And soon it did, he assumed, because the next thing he knew, he was being awoken to the sound of his alarm mixed with the sweet smell of sizzling bacon. Peter's eyes shot open before slamming shut once more, groaning at himself for being so stupidly excited that he forgot about the blinding light that would attack his senses.

Apparently Matt didn't forget and assumed something like this would happen, because Peter heard him chuckling in the kitchen.

Jerk.

He slowly cracked his eyes open, pleasantly surprised to see that the light was much more tolerable than before. Reaching over, he shut off the alarm only to see that the red lights blared 6:30 at him. He'd have probably fifteen minutes to get ready, before webslinging all the way to school to get there on time.

Peter hopped out of bed and quickly changed into his blue sweater, appreciating the fact that it

covered the web shooters attached to his wrists. He paired those with a pair of black jeans and threw on random sneakers before padding into the kitchen, where he saw the three amigos gathered around the bar. Karen was cooking, Foggy was reading reports, and Matt was... Well, Matt was being Matt.

As in, he was currently sitting on the counter with an ice pack planted across his busted lip.

“-a weird heartbeat, that’s all I got from him before I was getting socked in the face. Completely took me by surprise, I couldn’t even track his move-”

“Matt!” Peter whines, slumping while walking to the kitchen. Karen took the bacon off of the stove and put them on a plate filled to the brim with breakfast food, smiling in greeting. “What was the one thing I asked?”

Matt turned in Peter’s direction, a resigned look already placed on his face. His fingers gripped the ice pack harder, copying Peter’s motions with slouching. “Don’t come back black and blue...”

“And what did you do?” Peter asked, standing cross armed in front of the man. The latter sighed in a resigned way, facing his dangling feet. “Come back black and blue...”

Foggy went to town on the teasing all throughout the very quick breakfast, near tears with the amount of side jabbing he received from his laughing. Karen would come in with a few side comments, but left most of the banter for the old friends.

“Oh crap, I’m gonna be late!” Peter yelled after getting a glance of Foggy’s phone while stuffing his face with pancakes. He swallowed his bite (read: started choking and needed to down his entire glass of milk) before jumping to the bathroom, taking care of all of his business before rushing back out.

Everyone had gotten up from the table at that point, staring expectantly at the teen. “How are you gonna get there on time? I’m not sure even you could run there fast enough.” At that, Peter winked and rolled up his sleeves to expose his web shooters.

“I’m not running, I’m taking a *much* faster route.”

Karen nodded approvingly while Foggy shot him a jealous look. Matt just cocked his head in

confusion, before Peter rubbed his fingers against the metal against his wrists for Matt to catch the soundwaves. Then his mouth opened in an 'o' shape, nodding shortly after. "I've said it before and I'll say it again," Foggy interjected, throwing his hands up in the air, "you're *so cool*."

Peter laughed before remembering his time crunch, turning and running back into Matt's room where his suit was. Pulling it above his regular clothes felt awkward and wrong, but luckily when he hit his spider insignia nothing looked too awkward. He threw on his mask and greeted his AI before bouncing in the living room once more, looking at the trio.

Karen was radiating nothing but pride. Her eyes were watery and her hands were in front of her face, covering her mouth. Foggy looked awestruck, as if he couldn't believe he was in the same room as Spiderman. And Matt? Well, he managed to look everything that Peter imagined a father would look like on his kids' first day of school.

"Peter," robo-Karen rang throughout his ears, "if you don't leave in approximately thirty five seconds, you won't make it in time for the bell." Peter nodded at the reminder, bouncing on the balls of his feet. "Well guys," he addressed the group, "looks like I gotta swing. Wish I could stay, but I'm gonna be doing some life changing work today. You know that jazz, learning new things and stuff."

Karen laughed before coming up to him, pulling him in a tight hug. "I'm so proud of you," she told him earnestly. Foggy smiled from behind her, while Matt put an arm around him. Peter chuckled before returning the hug, awkwardly saying "this is nice."

That got everyone in the room laughing, much to Peter's embarrassment.

"Okay, okay, let go of the boy." Matt finally interjected, unwrapping his arm from Foggy's shoulder and instead moving closer to Peter. "You heard him, he has somewhere to be."

Peter shot him an appreciative smile, and hoped he was able to convey it through the suit.

Probably not.

(But Matt had spooky senses, he may have been able to tell either way.)

"Thanks for everything you guys, really. If I had more time, I'd talk to the end of the world about

how much this means to me.” Peter told them, shaking slightly with the force of the sudden hand clapped around his shoulder. He turned to the owner of said man, staring into his unseeing eyes. “Don’t mention it, squirt. Seriously. Now go, before I have to throw you out the window.”

Peter awkwardly laughed, unsure if Matt was joking or not.

With one last goodbye, Spiderman was shooting out the top door and onto the roof of their building, shooting a web out to the building next door before leaping off, taking the first nose dive to Midtown.

Everyone looked as if they’d seen a ghost, and they probably had.

That’s what Peter seemed to have become one in these past few months, anyways.

It was really weird when he first started walking to the school. The first few looks he got, he chalked it up to people being like ‘oh! That’s Peter Parker!’

Then that became too much, and he assumed he was still wearing a part of his Spiderman suit. But with a quick once over in the reflection of a car, he saw that no, his spider suit was tucked safely in his backpack.

When he got to the front of the school, it was worse. At that point, there were too many whispers containing his name for him to not feel anything but awkward. And instead of crippling under the weight of all of the stares in his general direction, he just lowered his gaze. If he didn’t know how many there were, he wouldn’t have to worry.

But even if he couldn’t see them, he could still feel them. Heard the whispers.

Apparently, his absence was more noticeable from his school than he anticipated.

It all went to hell when he walked through the front doors, however. It was like someone had taken

a dead body and hung it up on display. Everyone stopped their conversations, stopped moving, and just *stared*.

Stared at his clothes. His face. His hair. His everything. Their looks sent Peter's spidey sense lighting up his spine, making him stand rigid when all he wanted to do was slouch down and try to blend in.

But there was no blending for him, because the crowd were vultures, and he was the dead creature stuck under their talons.

Peter cleared his throat and gripped his backpack strap harder, wishing to just melt away.

A figure pushed their way to the front of the crowd, further eliciting the sound of complaints and random shoving noises. Eventually, they got to the front, where they were in clear view of Peter.

"Parker?"

Flash stood there looking absolutely stricken, face paling and eyes widening. Inwardly, Peter cringed. He had to have left a big impression if it caused Flash to use his actual last name, and not the phony one he somehow adopted over the years.

Peter swallowed and opened his mouth to answer, before the bell rang loudly and startled everyone out of their reverie. In the span of a few seconds the hallways were back to bustling, students starting to head to their first periods. Even if there were still tons of whispers surrounding his name, it was considerably less from a few minutes ago.

Flash was gone by the time Peter started walking.

He didn't think much of it.

Peter's first period wasn't interesting. Scratch that: it was interesting as all hell. AP Bio was always a fun subject for him. It's just...

He knew everything.

Which didn't come as a big surprise, before Aunt May died Peter would read ahead for fun and challenge himself with the information he learned. He had stacks upon stacks of random AP books for the courses, each holding different information.

And the book that his class was using? It was one that Peter had read. And memorized. And also considered child's play considering some of the other's he had read.

So he zoned out the entire class despite it being his first day and probably leaving a bad impression. But, to challenge that, he made sure to raise his hand absentmindedly and answer despite not paying attention for the moments prior.

It weirdly felt nice to have the stares be because of his intellectual level, and not for his sudden reappearance.

He was ripped out of his thoughts by the bell, shrilling loudly and demanding students to move. Peter did just that, stuffing his empty note page back into his backpack. His next class was across the school, which wouldn't be a problem.

If all of the whispers would stop.

Peter hated being the center of attention when he wasn't in costume. All of the head turns when he passed by was nearly driving him insane. He desperately wishes he at least had his earphones, because that'd make things more manageable.

Speaking of, his phone started buzzing in his pocket. Right as his eyes were averting to look down, however, he caught sight of familiar brown curly hair. Snapping his head back up in the general direction his line of sight just was, Peter was confused. Because there was nothing there.

Shrugging to himself, he looked back down at his phone to see a text from Matt.

"Hey, squirt. Everything alright? How is it so far?"

Peter smiled right as he entered his second period class, typing out a response. *"There's a lot of staring, and I knew everything in my first class. As well as everything that's going to be taught, and*

everything previously taught..."

He pocketed his phone and looked around the class, a little shocked and relieved to see that the only people he sort of knew were Betty Brant and Flash. Seeing as this was AP Lit, he was sure that they'd be reading a poem today.

Something about the two, however...

Peter turned away from them, but continued to look at them through his peripherals. Betty looked at him with a pitying smile on her face before grabbing her journal, while Flash continued looking at him. He looked.., almost guilty. *But for what?* Peter thought, squinting slightly.

Once more the bell rang and the class flew by, bringing the realization that yet again, Peter knew what was being taught because he read the textbook the teacher was going by. He still answered questions much to everyone's chagrin, Flash always managing to look amazed with the fact that even with no prior knowledge of the lesson, Peter knew exactly what to say to please the teacher.

Eventually he zoned out once more, mind wandering. His next class was AP Psychology, and he knew for a fact that he was only placed in that class because there weren't enough kids for the teacher. He wasn't complaining, however. Psychology could be cool and stuff, but he knew that it wasn't a subject he's studied before.

Also, he knew that Ned was taking psychology.

Which would make it the first period that Peter caught eyes with either of his old friends.

He didn't know what to expect, which felt like a cold bucket of water being splashed on his face. Not only would he be lost in the class, but he'd be lost with what to do in general. Was Ned still mad at him, or would he pity him? Talk to him like old times just because news about his suffering was local news to the student body?

Someone nudged him, and it was only then when he realized he was the last student in the class. He looked up at the teacher, before muttering "oh crap" and yanking his bag off of the ground, running out of the class after a short goodbye.

Peter rushed to his next class, managing to beat the bell by a miraculous two seconds. Students

turned once more towards him, but his eyes were trained at one specific group.

Ned and MJ. Both sitting together, staring at him in disbelief. Or Ned was, MJ just had her eyebrows raised. And in between them?

Flash.

Suddenly it made sense; the pitying glances Flash would send his way. The awkward movements made by him ever since he learned that Peter was back.

Peter had been replaced.

He swallowed the realization down and squashed the feeble hope that threatened to break out at the sight of his old friends. The teacher introduced himself as Mr. Nohls, and told him to sit in the only empty desk left.

The universe must really hate him, Peter decided. And then he blamed the Parker curse, as he made his way and sat at the desk. Right in front of the trio.

This class was going to be hell.

After the first few minutes, Peter was able to decipher that the unit was based on states of consciousness. Mr. Nohls was going over different sleep disorders, all of which Peter was well versed in. He wasn't *completely* lost, which was a godsend.

While scribbling in his notebook, his spider sense flared. Whatever was about to happen was small, and didn't require his immediate attention. So when he got hit in the back of the head with a paper ball, all he did was roll his eyes and continue his work.

When the second one came, Peter gripped his pencil harder, and wrote darker than before. After getting ignored for months, the least his old friends could do was give him a little more peace to just try to keep his head above water in the class.

And then the third one hit him in the arm.

His pencil snapped in half with how hard he was gripping it.

He huffed out a frustrated breath, digging in his backpack and grabbing another. At that point, the teacher went on to talk about the psychological effects of lack of sleep. Peter was finding the unit interesting, or at least, the parts he could pay attention to.

The fourth time his spidey sense flared, Peter snapped his arm out from in front of his and grabbed the ball in mid air, eyes never leaving his paper. The gasp that came from Ned was gratifying, and the strangled noise that erupted from Flash's throat was enough to make Peter crumple the ball even further, before dropping it on the ground and bringing his arm to rest on the desk once more.

And then, "Peter."

He didn't want to turn around.

Not one bit.

But there was something with hearing MJ's voice. The sweet alto sound mixed with the deep undertones of anger. The voice that Peter had to imagine for the past few months because he was sure he'd never hear it again. The same voice that told him that he was insignificant in their last interaction.

So he turned around. Not because he wanted to, but because he wanted the paper balls to stop.

"*What?*" He snapped, sounding much harsher than planned. The look on all of their faces was worth it, however. None of them bothered to conceal their surprise, before after a few seconds they all steeled their expressions.

She quirked her eyebrow once more in challenge.

Peter felt his signature Spiderman aura wash over him, deep and heavy and well defined after spending so much time with Daredevil.

Ned was the one who said something breaking the tension. "Dude, where have you been?"

And something in Peter may have snapped at that. If it was the same tone that he was used to with Ned, maybe he would've fallen for it. If there was genuine concern in the question, maybe he would've told him what was happening. What *has* been happening.

But the only thing in the question was malice, and Peter retaliated.

“Around. Not here, obviously.”

Flash shrunk in his seat, sensing this wasn't his conversation to jutt in on. MJ squinted, before sighing in defeat.

A lot had to have changed with Peter if he was able to win against MJ.

“Look, we left off on bad terms,” she told him. Peter shot her a look that perfectly conveyed ‘oh really?’ Shockingly, she ignored it. “But that was because you weren't telling us things. Do you really believe that continuing this, whatever you're keeping from us, is a good idea?”

And there it was. She lightly put it in terms, but that was it.

Him not telling them things.

Peter not spilling his secret about Spiderman was the reason they weren't friends.

All of his excuses for random injuries- “I tried to see if I could run faster than the car next to me, and ended up face planting into the ground,” “I bruise easily,” “I gave blood the other day and they fucked with my vein.”

Every cover for him needing to leave- “I think i'm going to throw up,” “My aunt is calling me,” “Mr. Stark is at the front, he says he needs me for an internship project that needs to be turned in later!”

Every. Single. Lie.

All for what? To cover his alias, hide that part of himself from his friends?

And yeah, sure, he trusted Ned. Or he used to. But Peter knew that Ned would turn Spiderman into a publicity stunt. Something to garner attention, get them to climb up the social chain. And even if Peter admittedly found that appealing, it just wasn't him. He wasn't meant to be popular, or even to have many friends. He wasn't that before Spiderman, so he shouldn't be that after Spiderman,

And MJ? Peter knew that she could've kept his secret. No doubt in his mind. But she'd also use it as blackmail against him. Or always allude to it in public situations just to watch how upset he got. She'd gauge him and his reactions, always test him to see just where he'd draw the line. And he wasn't sure if she'd stop after that.

Plus, Peter hadn't even told May. Only Tony knew his secret at the time, and even that took months for him to crack. Even if he was more likely to spill the beans to his friends than his only family member, he still wanted to let her know before them. It felt wrong to have more than one person stuck in his position.

But he didn't get to tell May. And with how fast they cut him out of their lives, Peter is kind of glad he didn't cave in and just let his two old friends know what was happening.

Peter sighed, and looked directly at her once more. "I'm not having this conversation with you. Not right now."

That seemed to be Ned's snapping point, because he slammed his hands on his desk and whisper-shouted "what is *wrong* with you?"

Flash jumped, and Peter couldn't do anything but stare. "Mr. Leeds!" The teacher yelled, turning his attention to the two desks. Ned instantly looked guilty, but it didn't matter. The damage was done. "Please, leave Mr. Parker alone. He has a lot to catch up on."

Peter finally moved his gaze away, instead looking at the paper ball still littered on the ground. The absolute weight of the world felt like it was shoving him down, stopping him from being able to breathe properly. Guilt clawed at his ribs and frustration fueled the fire.

There was only a resigned amount of shame in his voice when he quietly answered "I couldn't tell you before, and I can't tell you now. I'm sorry..."

The rest of class passed by in a blur. He stopped paying attention, despite his best efforts to try to write down everything. His mind was plagued with too many emotions, each one fighting for dominance over his mood.

But only emptiness coated his soul.

That's all he could think about while Mr. Nohls droned on. All he could think about when the bell rang, and he got up to leave. All he thought about when he felt someone nudge his shoulder to get his attention, but never stopped for them.

The rest of the school day was spent like that, and Peter found that he was okay with it.

The comfortable numbness that settled into his bones was so reminiscent of his time living in the warehouse.. It distracted him from all the eyes and whispers, as well as all the attempts his 'friends' wasted trying to get his attention.

When Peter came to his senses, he was walking outside. Students bustled past him to get on buses, get to their cars, or to simply walk home. The sudden change in light caused his sensitive eyes to burn, making him squint and lower his head to give them time to adjust.

Great, he thought, *I just disassociated throughout the entirety of school*. He rolled his eyes, only looking up when his spidey sense started fluttering up his back.

Peter felt his footsteps falter and his posture turn rigid. Saw as his eyesight blurred for a few seconds, gaze turning distant as his head directed him towards an unknown location. Every single one of his muscles were on lock, adrenaline spiking. Telling him to move, do something.

He was running to the nearest alley before his brain had time to process that there was trouble.

If he wasn't furiously trying to get out of his clothes and into his spider suit, he'd laugh at the irony of everything. The familiarity of the scene, his actions, the insistent electric shock that ran through his bones telling him to hurry up.

Just like it always had when he left school.

It took longer than he'd like, but soon Peter was decked out in his red and blue costume, Karen powering up and adjusting his sensation receivers, dimming the input to adhere to his senses. His web shooters clicked in place, and he threw his backpack in the air to stick it to the brick wall.

"Hello, Peter. Your vitals seem to be rapidly increasing. What's wrong?" Karen asked, before searching her database for any police calls made in the area recently. Peter put his left foot on the wall, and then the right, and was running up it shortly after.

Spiderman had only a vague idea of where he was swinging to when jumping from the top of the building, spidey sense guiding him like a light in a snow storm. He chose not to answer Karen, instead focusing on sounds around him. Distantly, there was the sound of metal crunching metal, along with car horns beeping and then rapidly being cut off.

He shot a web out and took a harsh left, getting a birds eye view of a car speeding down the street, weaving quickly in between other vehicles.

"Oh *shit*" he mutters to himself, watching as the vehicle quickly accelerated the farther it went. Acting faster than before, Spiderman shot two webs further in front of him and tugged, sending himself catapulting towards the street.

When he got close enough to yell and for the people below to hear him, he commanded "move! Everyone, get off the road!" Luckily, hearing the voice of a superhero be coated with stress was enough to get people to actually listen. Vehicles were left abandoned on the sides, making a clear path for the runaway.

A few short thwips later, and Spiderman was landing on top of the hood. He leaned over and punched the driver side window, ignoring the screams from inside. "Hey, what's go-" he cut off, eyes on his mask widening to mimic his expression.

In the driver's seat was a panicked Flash, gripping the console like their life depended on it was MJ, and in the back trying to hold both doors was Ned.

What a wonderful coincidence, he cursed his Parker luck.

"The- the brakes! They're not working!" Flash got out, jerking the wheel to avoid a car. Everyone jostled and screamed louder, sweat sticking to their foreheads. Spiderman looked forward and saw

a rapidly approaching building, straight in their path.

Curse New York and their T intersections.

With a quick glance at the speedometer (just watching the needle hit 130 and continue rising was enough to make his chest tighten with second hand anxiety) Spiderman knew what he had to do.

“Hope you value your life more than this vehicle!” He yelled out, jumping off and shooting a web a distance away before he could hear Flash’s reaction.

Am I really about to take the full weight of this vehicle? He idly wondered, already shuffling his feet and bracing his arms in position.

“Good luck, Peter,” Karen answered his question.

And then things went sideways. Or rather, not exactly as planned.

It started off with Flash’s realization that he was about to run into Spiderman. Aka, a hero. One that would surely get him killed by the fan base. Acting purely off of instinct, he grabbed the wheel with one arm and held his other in front of MJ, taking a sharp right.

The problem?

They were already too close, so all it did was bring the drivers side of the vehicle barreling into Peter.

The vehicle crashed straight into his hands, taking all of the air out of his lungs. His arms were pushed back closer to his body and his feet skidded backwards, trying to fight inertia. A strained sound came from his throat, shortly followed by his own yell. MJ, Ned, and Flash were all shrieking in the car, not exactly helping. The tires screeched, leaving marks on the road and smoke billowing into the air.

His hands left indents in the car, keeping it in place and preventing it from cruising anywhere else. Distantly, behind all of his thoughts that mainly consisted of variants of ‘ *holy shit, holy shit, holy*

SHIT, ‘*am I actually doing this?*’ and ‘*God, cars are so heavy,*’ he realized that he ruined the doors on Flash’s car, meaning there’d only be two ways to exit.

After what felt like an eternity, but was truly only a couple of seconds, the car stopped. Spiderman uncurled his fingers from the metal, eyes widening at the mold he made. He was panting with exertion, muscles still tense. Flash turned to look at him in wonder as Spiderman backed away, staggering into the wall and putting a hand on his face.

No matter how many times he does it, it’s always absolutely terrifying to see a car come flying towards you. It’s even worse when he has to catch it, and now he’s learning that it’s absolute hell when it’s people he knows in the vehicle.

“Wow,” he said breathlessly, “I hope you guys just had the ride of your lives, because I never want to do that again!” He attempted to joke, watching as all of them tried to collect themselves. Karen showed each of their individual vitals in the corner of his lense, displaying no critical injuries. Just the fact that they were in shock, which was completely understandable.

He pushed himself off the wall and made his way to MJ’s door, opening it despite its locked position. Her eyes widened at his outstretched hand, before she tumbled out and pulled him in a tight hug. Once more, he found himself backing up slightly in surprise, before awkwardly bringing his arms to wrap around her shaking body.

“Thank you,” she whispered, holding him tighter. This close, Peter could smell her old rose perfume that she always used. Despite the circumstances, it still brought a sense of comfort over him. He didn’t realize how much he missed it, and then right after felt awful because Peter wasn’t the one experiencing this; Spiderman was.

“It’s my duty, M-” he cut himself off, realizing his almost mistake. Luckily, he knew how to salvage his mistake. “Might I ask your name?”

Play it off as a stutter.

Cool.

Before she could answer, Flash started getting out. Spiderman had to disengage from their small moment to help him out, albeit reluctantly. He offered his hand out and watched as Flash took it with shaky hands, pulling him out of the busted vehicle. “Wow- I mean, like, holy shit did that just

happen?" Flash rambled, shaking Peter's hand like a handshake.

And then realization dawned on him.

His face paled significantly and his body froze, all notions stopping.

"Oh God, my father is gonna kill me."

Ned was the last to come out, having more time to compose himself than the others. "Oh my gosh, you're Spiderman!" He yelled out excitedly, face brightening despite the fact that he could've died. Peter chuckled, holding his hand out once more. "It appears I am. And who might you guys be?"

He said it more to be conversational and to keep up his reputation as friendly, of course. Luckily, Ned soaked up the attention bestowed upon him and pointed to each of them like an excited kid. "That's Michelle, but I think you can call her MJ, That's Flash, the one over there having an existential crisis, and I'm Ned, one of your biggest fans!!"

Flash shook his head to clear it, reminding Peter of a dog. Michelle took in a deep breath and held it, before steeling herself and hiding her still shaking hands behind her back. And just like that, the trio were back to their regular selves.

The changes people make about themselves in the span of a few seconds is astonishing.

"That's so cool!" Spiderman cheered jovially, bouncing on the balls of his feet. As much as he wanted to stay, he knew that it would only be more suspicious. Plus, he had to get home to Matt eventually. "Also, uh, sorry about your car," he awkwardly added, turning to Flash and shrugging his shoulders, bringing a hand to run through his hair despite the mask still attached to his suit.

There was a quiet tapping coming from Peter's left, but it was still far enough for him not to care. Just to note.

Flash's eyes widened, before he started gesturing wildly towards Peter and his car. "Dude, it was either that or our lives! You saved us, man!" To accentuate his point, he looked to his friends, who all nodded in approval.

Peter blushed under his suit. “It’s no problem, really! I was in the area anyways, and heard the tires from a few streets away. I couldn’t just leave you to maneuver throughout New York going that speed, you know?”

He was acutely aware of the audience they garnered, as well as the slow dissipation of said people. However, the tapping was getting louder. Closer. Peter furrowed his eyebrows under the suit, lenses following his facial expression.

Michelle piped up, finally finding her voice. “That’s great and everything, but we still need to get home.” Her throat was scratchy and made her sound sickly, but they all could still understand what she meant. Both Ned and Flash looked at her with widened eyes, before shouting varying questions of ‘are you insane?’ and ‘I’m never setting foot in a car again!’

The rhythmic tapping was close now, and Peter couldn’t for the life of him put his finger on where he’s heard it before.

His spidey sense tickled the back of his neck, making the hairs on his arms stick up and causing him to bite his lip. And suddenly, Peter knew he was screwed.

The tapping stopped, right as something whacked Spiderman in the ankle.

Everyone turned but him.

“Oh, I’m sorry!” A chuckle. “I’m looking for Midtown High... But I think I got mixed up somewhere? Would you be so kind as to help me?”

Matt was facing Peter directly, warm smile directed towards him with an outstretched hand. Slowly, Spiderman turned to face him, grabbing his hand and shaking in welcome. “Of course, I would!” He said happily through gritted teeth.

“Why are you going to the school?” Flash asked in a completely curious tone, his usual snark absent. Maybe it was the obvious fact that Matt was blind that held him back. Matt pretended to be shocked at the fact that there was more than the person who he happened to tap, turning in the general direction of the trio. “Well, I’m heading there to pick up my son, Peter. Parker? Perhaps you know him, today is his first day back and I figured I would surprise him with a visit and walk him home. Or rather, walk with him.”

The universe must be rolling on the ground laughing at this point. Perhaps this was purgatory. Surely it couldn't *all* be his Parker luck.

Of course Matt would come. He probably heard Peter catch the vehicle and ran as fast as he could to get here. As punishment for worrying him, he probably thought it'd be best to embarrass him by talking to him about *him* .

Confusing.

Nevertheless, they both watched (Or rather Matt listened while Peter saw) as the three dropped their jaws, absolute shock washing over them. MJ slackened her arms from their crossed position across her chest, and Ned managed to look as confused as a seahorse. "I- uh- what?" He managed to get out, somehow sounding betrayed.

Was... Was Ned shocked that Peter never told him about Matt?

In the few short seconds-- two, to be exact-- Peter had to think about this, he came to a few conclusions. One, Ned was still caught up on him. Like before when they were best friends, before Spiderman. When they told each other everything and when things were fine and dandy. Two, Matt has called him his son, and was actively trying to make Peter melt on the spot. Three, that sly son of a gun probably knew who these people were, and was trying to intentionally make them feel bad.

Matt gave him a closed lip smile, putting both of his hands on his white cane and leaning on it. "I'm assuming you know him?" he asked conversationally, completely ignoring the literal superhero and boy in question next to him. Flash closed his mouth and swallowed before shaking his head in confirmation, only spitting out a verbal response when MJ hit his arm rather forcefully.

"Then perhaps one of you can direct him to me." Matt finished, red tinted glasses sticking out from his immaculate black and white suit. All three turned to Spiderman, who put his head down in defeat. "I'll help you out, sir. It's absolutely no problem!" He tried to sound cheery, not letting the other know how embarrassed he was.

Matt's smile turned all teeth, and yeah, *there was no way he wasn't soaking in this*. "Thank you!" He said, holding out his arm. Peter walked up and grabbed his upper arm, before looping his arm through completely. Matt's hand brushed against the fabric of his suit as he folded his cane and pretended to jump a little, looking confused. "I- uh... I'm sorry, but are you wearing gloves? In this

heat?”

If Peter wanted to disappear and move to Fiji before, he sure as hell wanted to now.

Michelle, Ned, and Flash all looked amused, trying to hold in their smiles and failing. Spiderman spluttered, before saying *very* politely “I’m a superhero, sir. I gotta protect my identity! Can’t have someone recognizing me by my hands or something. Plus, it’d look stupid if I had a mask on and nothing else.” Matt turned to face him, looking shocked. “Well, just my luck! A hero to help me find my boy! How nice. Now, I’m not sure when school let out, so we should hurry, yeah?”

“Of course!” Peter answered, maneuvering Matt to avoid the busted up car. He turned his head to the trio still standing, shouting back a “Good luck with your dad, Flash!” before leaving.

Belatedly, he realized that none of them were so shell shocked after almost dying. In fact, now that he thought about it, he noticed that none of their hands were shaking. They were calm, at least enough to revel in Peter’s misery brought on by a certain lawyer.

And then it clicked.

Matt acted like a huge shit just so that they would focus on something else and wouldn’t be panicking anymore. He was probably tuned into their heartbeats and was waiting for them to get to an acceptable range before leaving.

Suddenly, the humiliation seemed to be worth it.

However...

“Matt, what in the *hell* are you doing here?” He asked, ignoring the way New Yorkers turned their way as Spiderman lead a leisurely walking blind man through the streets. Matt cocked his head, before answering “You suited up seconds after leaving the school. Was I not supposed to be suspicious? And then not even two minutes later, you’re preparing to catch a speeding vehicle that would’ve obliterated the average human.” A few seconds pass, before Matt looked down and answered quieter, “I was worried.”

For his sake, Peter pretended not to hear.

(They both knew he did.)

It was silent for a few minutes, the trip lasting much longer than before since Peter wasn't flying through the sky at breakneck speeds. They took left, and were facing Midtown. "Well, we're here. I'll need to go get my backpack and change out of my suit before we can leave, though. Are you okay to wait?"

Matt thought about it for a few seconds, before shaking his head in affirmation. "It *would* look pretty sketchy if Spiderman was leading a blind man into a random alley." Peter laughed, before shooting a web out in the direction of his clothes. Right before he jumped to take off, however, he turned to Matt. "What you said back there, about me being your son..."

The man turned in Peter's direction, before waving his hand in a send off. "We'll discuss it later. Go, get your stuff. And then I want to hear about your day."

Spiderman cocked his head to the side, before a lippy grin spread across his face.

He tugged on his web, and then took off.

"I wasn't kidding about wanting to hear about your day, just in case you didn't know."

Matt was laying on the couch with his legs propped up on the coffee table, tea cup steaming in his hand. He was facing the wall leading to his bedroom, smiling at the sound of Peter's socked feet padding throughout the kitchen.

"Yeah yeah, just give me a minute," the teen called, grabbing the sugar and stirring a little into his tea. Once he was happy with it, he immediately chugged it all in one go. When he brought the mug down from his face, he saw Matt turned around to look at him with the most disturbed look, arm resting over the back.

Peter laughed at his expression, choosing to take the blanket off of the chair and climb up the wall. He walked until he was straight above Matt before unleashing his webs, making a droopy

hammock. Matt scoffed down below, calling him a showoff, before moving his legs from the coffee table to extend over the rest of the couch, successfully angling his face towards the now completed web.

Clutching the blanket closer, Peter clambered into his creation, sighing happily as he covered his curled up form.

They stayed silent for a few minutes. Between the rush of stopping the car, running throughout the city, and just all around working, both Matt and Peter needed the small reprieve from sensory. They were both thankful for these moments.

But Peter had to break it eventually.

“I had a... I guess a bad day,” he told Matt, fingers running over the intricate patterns of his cocoon. A hum came from under him, and he knew that Matt had his eyes closed. “I was right about knowing everything, you know. Didn’t learn a single thing except for in my psychology class. Which, I’m only in because every other extracurricular was filled. The class is interesting though, so I can’t complain.”

“Sounds like a blessing,” Matt told him, entwining his fingers and laying them under his head so his elbows were sticking out. Peter rolled his eyes playfully, before his features grew heavy. Sad. “I guess.”

Matt noticed the shift in his tone, eyebrows furrowing slightly and lips puffed out as he waited for more information. And of course, he didn’t have to wait long. Peter sighed and took a fistful of webbing, appreciating the fact that it didn’t break under his hold. “Those people I saved, the three amigos? Yeah. They weren’t always like that. The tall one used to be rude to me, while Ned and MJ-- Or I guess Michelle, would stand up for me. It’s nice to know that I’ve been replaced, though. While I’ve been here wondering if they thought about me throughout the months, I guess the answer was laid out for me.”

Matt finally opened his unseeing eyes, tilting his head in question. “Wait, they replaced you?” The disbelief was evident in his voice, arms tensing in the slightest under his white collared shirt. It was Peter’s turn to hum in affirmation, head bobbing as a reflex.

Silence began to stretch between them once more. But unlike last time, this wasn’t a welcomed one. This absence of sound was foul; it stopped the questions both parties had, and prevented any more interaction to happen.

Peter felt like he had to fight tooth and nail with his throat to get the next bits out. “They’re the only reasons I stayed in high school, you know? Could’ve graduated early. Grades have never dropped below a ninety seven and I’ve been approached multiple times with the suggestion. But I couldn’t leave my life behind. My friends were everything to me, they were the one consistent thing in my life when everything was changing.”

He scoffed at his past self for not noticing sooner. “Clearly, I was wrong.”

Suddenly, an idea ran through Matt’s lawyer-esque mind. An absurd idea, but an appropriate one nonetheless.

“Why don’t you do that now? Graduate early, I mean.”

Peter stopped all of his moments, eyes widening. He shifted so that he was propped up by his elbows, leaning down and peering at Matt, who looked relaxed as ever. “Because it’s only been one day? Plus, it would be a waste on all the amount of time we spent trying to get me *to* school.”

Matt’s eyes met his, and he shrugged. “Really, it was no hassle. How about this: you give it the rest of the week. If things don’t get better, you take the test or whatever needed so you can leave early. If they do, then you stay. Deal?”

And now that the idea had made its way into Peter’s brain, there was no stopping him from dissecting every bit. The entire purpose of him going to school was to graduate and not need to get a GED later on in life. And, so that he would have a better shot at getting into a good college if he wanted- which he did.

But to have the option to opt out? To leave early? That was new. Plus, that may appeal to big time colleges if a junior was smart enough to leave. It may give him more opportunities. And he didn’t exactly have anything holding him back anymore...

“Deal.”

Matt smiled pleasingly, bruise across his lip straining in the slightest with the movement. Peter huffed out a breath of air in lieu, turning back into his cocoon and snuggling closer in the blanket.

The rest of the night was spent in the blissful atmosphere created by the serene sounds of the city. Both Peter and Matt stayed in, choosing to relish in the one day of quiet versus another spent in hectic movements.

A week. He'd give it a week.

Michelle met him in front of the school.

He wasn't paying attention to who was there, so really it may have been his fault. While swinging to school, Peter had to stop a few times to solve simple crimes. An attempted mugging, a bike stealer, and a cat who was playing on the roof of an apartment building.

Peter's mind was still running over that last one when he heard it.

"Hey."

Instantly his muscles tensed up under his giant hoodie (really, it was Matt's, but who needs to know?). Peter continued walking, pretending like he didn't hear her call his name.

A quick succession of footsteps told him that his efforts were futile.

"Hey- Peter, I'm talking to you!" She grabbed onto his arm, stopping him from moving any further. At this point his muscles were all locked, daring her to do anything. He didn't turn his head, unsure as to why he was reacting so violently to Michelle.

She must've felt or saw the distress she was causing, for she let go like she had been burned. "Can we talk?" she asked, in a quieter voice. Then, "alone?"

They still had enough time. The first bell wasn't set to ring for another ten minutes. Either he could spend the time doing something like listening to music or looking up study sets for his classes, or he could stay and listen to whatever Michelle wanted to talk to him about. Logically, the answer was easy. Morally? That was a different story.

So Peter pursed his lips, eyes closing as he cursed himself and turned around. When he opened them again, he noticed how Michelle startled at the look in his eyes. “Five minutes. No more, and no less.”

She gave him an affirming nod, copying his facial expression before leading him past the crowd and to a private area in the middle of the school grounds, one surrounded by trees and benches for students to sit at.

Michelle took him under an oak tree, looking around to make sure nobody was around. When she was sure that the nearest person wasn’t in hearing range, she turned back to him and sighed, crossing her arms in front of her chest protectively.

“Look,” she started, as he brought his hands into his pocket in front of the hoodie. “I... We owe you an explanation.” Michelle shook her head and looked down, as if that was one of the hardest things she had to admit.

Peter scoffed, looking at the leaves above them. “Yeah, really? An explanation for what? Leaving? Not caring what happened to me for months? *Replacing* me? Because those are just a few small things that I want an explanation for.”

Yeah, maybe he shouldn’t have said that. But she gave him an opening, and he took it. He was hurt, afterall. She and Ned were once his forever. Now forever was just a memory lost in the years of adolescence.

She looked surprised and a little hurt at his questions, before clearing her throat and steeling her expression. “For... everything, I guess.” She told him, arm coming up to wave in the air before dropping back above her other, tucking it into her body.

Peter leant all of his weight on one leg, cocking his hip out. “Well? I’m all ears.”

She looked at him, before averting her eyes. Distantly, in the back of his mind, Peter realized that she was at least making an effort. He shouldn’t be so harsh to her.

But then he remembered how absolutely lonely he had been while living in that warehouse, and how obviously happy she had been.

Then he didn't feel so bad.

"When we fought, Ned and I were hurt. You refused to tell us what was going on with you, and then you left. No explanation whatsoever. We confided in Flash, because he was there and he didn't like you as well. And we said things we shouldn't've, but we grew close. Found out we had a lot in common. And--"

"Shut up."

Startled wasn't the expression he could use to define Michelle's face in that moment. Her usually bored brown eyes were blown wide, jaw dropped and eyebrows furrowed. As if she'd never expect those venomous two words to come from Peter.

Peter, who had 'intentionally' tried to hurt her and Ned. Peter, who left for no good reason. Peter, who managed to bring people together in wake of his own misery.

Peter, who was *so* tired of this shit.

"Excuse me?" She asked, as if not believing that he was expressing his true emotions towards her.. Their time limit was forgotten, all that was on Peter's mind was anger. *How dare they?*

"I don't want to hear it anymore. All of this, everything. It's complete *bullshit* because you only know your side." He started laughing, looking around as if anyone around him could hear the absolute madness this conversation was.

Fury seeped into her facial expression as she took the laughter in challenge. "Oh, really? And what's your 'side'?" She mocked, using air quotes over the last word. "That your secrets finally caught up to you? That you were too busy with that to text--"

"My aunt died, Michelle!" He nearly screamed, apparently having to remind her of his misfortunes. Thankfully, she shut her mouth as if contemplating for the first time the battle that had to have conspired in wake of the last Parker relative dying. "She died and I had to fend for myself while you were busy getting buddy-buddy with Flash! Busy replacing me!"

She pursed her lips, before starting once more. "The least you could've done--"

He cut her off once more, pointing at her and then cupping both of his hands respectively and bringing them to jab into his chest. “The least you could’ve done is fucking *text* me! But no, you couldn’t be bothered to care for me, could you? Too focused on suspicions to see the truth!”

Maybe she had planned this. Planned on throwing excuses, planned on getting him to pity her. Because that was old Peter Parker. The one before he lost his uncle and his aunt. The one who still talked to Tony and found solace in him. The one who didn’t have to practically starve himself for months because he lived in an old crappy warehouse because he couldn’t live as himself anymore.

But, just as the season shifts from lovable autumn to frivolous winter, he changed. Morphed, and learned from his past. Became something bigger, something better. He wasn’t a pushover, and wouldn’t fall for her games anymore.

"You left us, Parker. You-

"No, that's bullshit! You're the one who walked away from me! Don't try to make me feel guilty for your decisions!"

He shook his head as if he couldn’t believe that was really happening. And in all honesty, he couldn’t. “I’m sorry, Peter. But you’re insignificant to me if you can’t actually tell me things like a normal person would.’ Do you remember that? Because I do.” Guilt flashed upon her face once more, the first break in her exterior since this started. “Insignificant, right? Funny. Hilarious. A knee slapper!”

Peter swept his hands to either side of him, gesturing to the area around them. “If you thought that I didn’t tell you anything before, get ready for a whole new Parker.” He shrugged with a quick plastic smile, before dropping it just as fast. “Don’t you dare try to talk to me again. I’m not going to be your friend only when it’s convenient for you. You and Ned aren’t there to hold me back anymore, and I’m only just now seeing how much you truly hindered me rather than helped.”

The bell chose that moment to ring, signalling that students needed to start heading towards their first period.

He left Michelle standing under that Oak tree, not taking a second glance behind him.

“Matt! Matt, oh my gosh, you’re never gonna believe my day! Maaaaaatt!”

Peter bounded into the front door, fingers not fully twisting on the knob yet. He ran into the door with a barely concealed ‘oof’, before the door opened. In the kitchen, he could hear Foggy snickering.

His backpack flung off of his shoulders as he rounded the corner, out of breath from running home in excitement. Matt seemed surprised at the energetic burst, with his eyebrows raised and his mouth pulled in a smile. “Matt! There you are!”

Before the man in question could even say anything, Peter was already jumping into the story. “Okay so like you probably already know that I saved people before school, because that’s like a given. But! When I got to school Michelle wanted to talk to me! And I know, like, *what?* How’s that interesting? But here’s the thing!” He took a breath, arms gesticulating wildly with every sentence. “I stood up against her! Yeah, it was sad because I was basically kissing away our old friendship, but it was also *so* gratifying to get that off of my chest.”

“And that’s not even everything! I think I got her feeling bad for what she for what she did, because when I left she looked like she felt guilty. And normally I would be beating myself up about that because ‘wow Parker, that’s pretty rude,’ but then I saw the way she retold Ned our interaction in hushed whispers and got to hear him tell her that they were in the wrong this entire time. He understood where I was coming from! Wow! And then..!”

Foggy, previously enraptured with the story, shook his head in disbelief. He refused to take his eyes off of Peter, whispering “*oh my God there’s more.*”

“One of my old teachers walked up to me and hugged me and told me she missed me! How nice! And then she smacked my arm and told me to leave already, I was too smart to be hanging out around school. I laughed at her and told her I was considering it, and next thing I know, I’m in principal Morita’s office discussing the probability of it!”

Peter huffed, out of breath. His arms lowered to his side and he still had a pleased smile on his face, looking at Matt for approval. Matt laughed breathlessly, looking down and moving his head side to side before getting up and heading to Peter. Once they were close enough, Matt pulled him into a side hug, using his other arm to come up and ruffle Peter’s hair. “Hey!” he yelled out, trying to bend to get away from Matt’s hand. The man just laughed and moved down with him, continuing to assault his hair.

“Aw, yes! Fight, fight, fight!” Foggy cheered on the sidelines, watching the squabble amusedly. Eventually, Matt won by managing to throw Peter over his shoulder like a firefighter. “Uncle, Matty! Uncle!” Peter wheezed out, sides hurting from laughing so hard.

Matt finally found mercy and put Peter down, collapsing in the chair next to the bar. Once they were all calmed down, he turned in Peter’s direction and told him “I’m glad that you had such a good day, Sticky Malicky.” He paused to take a drink from a random glass of water that appeared, and then continued. “So, you’re going to graduate early?”

His head bobbed in confirmation as he went to pick his backpack up off of the floor, instead depositing it on the couch. “Yeah, might as well, right? I have the option, so I should take it. Plus, now the principal is intrigued because it’s another chance to show that Midtown breeds geniuses.”

Foggy’s fist made a dull ‘clunk’ against the countertop as he moved it from in front his mouth. “Wow, I wish I was that smart when I was in high school.” Peter shot him a confused look, mind flashing back to times where he heard in passing that Foggy graduated college cum laude, with Matt ahead in summa cum laude. Foggy raised an eyebrow in challenge, telling him “I wasn’t always that smart, homeslice. I had to work my ass off in college to make up for what I didn’t do in high school.”

Peter nodded in understanding, before yawning. Matt snapped his head towards Peter so quickly that one would assume that he heard the ticking of a bomb. “You’re tired,” he stated, not leaving room for comments.

But of course, Peter found a way to get past that. “No..! I’m just yawning because there wasn’t enough oxygen going to my brain. Perfectly fine!” He started walking towards his backpack, shrinking under Matt’s distant gaze. “In fact... Fine enough to... Go on patrol...,” he said hesitantly, smiling as if it was gonna help his case. Foggy, the undying spidey supporter that he was, took it upon himself to distract DareDad from his prey. “God, Matty. You’re such a dad, it’s unbelievable.”

Mission successful. Peter smiled appreciatively as Matt spluttered, turning towards his friend. The best part about it, though? Matt didn’t bother denying it. Just defending himself. “He’s tired! How is he going to be jumping around bullets and catching buses if he’s falling asleep on his webs! No, Foggy-- stop laughing, genuine concern here-- I don’t want to go out and have to peel Spidey guts off of the floor because he went to sleep while swinging above traffic!”

Peter snapped his mask on over his face rather loudly to get the two’s attention. Foggy smiled devilishly as Matt’s mouth dropped, both silenced at the sight (or perception) of Spiderman standing in front of them. “Well, it was nice to hear you two talk about how tired I am, but really!

I'm fine! So I'm gonna go out, and y'know, save lives and stuff. See you later, Matty!"

Before the man had a chance to recover, Spiderman was hopping out of the door leading to the roof, laughing all the way.

(And if he got home earlier than usual and crashed harder than before, whose business was it other than his own?)

The apartment was cold the next day when Peter came home from school.

He was excited to share his day with Matt. Every single detail, up from his time swinging to school all the way to him trudging back in the rain. All of his classes that he breezed through, as well as his only class that had him contemplating abstract concepts and how to apply them in real life situations.

But the apartment was cold, and it sent shivers up Peter's spine as he was reminded of his and May's apartment on that first night he spent alone.

"Matt?" He asked the silence, hoping for an answer. But alas, he didn't get one. Just the constant pounding of rain on the window, filling the void left by the absence of an answer.

Worry plagued his thoughts, focusing on and amplifying any and all bad situations. He dumped his backpack by the door and cautiously walked through the entrance of the apartment, eyes wide and alert. His hands were braced at his sides for no other reason than to prepare for a fight, one he's not even sure would need to take place. The pounding of his heart sounded like bass drums being played straight in front of him, the quickening pace being familiar to his years in band before the bite.

"Matt..?" he asked again, only for the comfort of his own mind. The door to his bedroom was closed, the insides dark despite the clouded light that shone through the windows.

With tunnel vision, he weaved through the couches and coffee table. He knew exactly where they were and how many steps he needed to take to avoid them, which is why he came to a stumbling

halt when his foot hit something. When he looked down, he stopped completely.

Matt's Daredevil helmet.

Any and all anxious thoughts roared their ugly heads as his eyes widened at the symbolic part of his iconic suit. Matt never, *ever* left his equipment out in the open. There's too much of a risk to do so, a risk that he never indulged in breaking.

Peter looked back up the door, and took his next few steps briskly.

When he opened the door, he wasn't sure what he was expecting. His mind was at war with itself between convincing him that Matt was dying. He wasn't back from his nightly patrol when Peter left for school that morning, which really should've been the first indicator that something was wrong. The other side of his brain was telling him that Matt was okay; probably just left the helmet out to clean or something. He wouldn't be home, which is why it felt so cold.

But literally speaking, cold wasn't the only way to describe the apartment. It was also metaphorically. Everything carried a heavy weight to it, unbridled secrets that would never leave these walls. Fresh, cumulating stories that Matt produced and Peter was learning.

But when his hand hit the doorknob and Matt's sliding door moved, there was nothing to prepare Peter for what he was going to see.

Blood streaked the floor, coming from the broken window and leading to the bed. The decorating lamp that Karen had gifted them was laying on the ground, shattered pieces mixing with glass. Matt's Daredevil suit was thrown precariously around the floor, holes protruding from every section. A large gash spread from where his abdomen would be, cutting off and starting again with his armored pants.

And Matt?

Matt was laying on the bed, looking more bloody than clean. His breaths were slow and shallow, sounding more like a wheeze than anything. There was a darkened puddle surrounding him, sheets ruined with the prolonged exposure.

Peter's heart stalled, frozen by horrific déjà vu; the chaotic crimson twain of the ones who he had

loved, yet failed to protect, seared into his eyes. The blood that coated his hands as he held Ben, the horrific sight of a puddle leaving May's rapidly cooling body.

Matt couldn't be the next. He wouldn't.

He was across the room in seconds, with the desperate plea in the form of a name.

"Matt!"

The man again seemed to choke on an inhale, and his unseeing eyes slid open; revealing complete and utter agony. He struggled to form a response, but clearly tried to make an effort to compose himself for the child in the room.

"..Pete, I-It's okay." He says as he shakily reaches over, settling his blood-smeared hand over Peter's own trembling hand. And of course, he's trying to console Peter. Because that's just who Matt is. You could chop off his arm and he would be checking to make sure his blood wasn't getting on anyone else.

In the back of his mind, he may have made the connection that Matt acts like a certain billionaire, in that regard.

He's not dying. Peter tries to remind himself, but he can't help the terror clinging to his bones. "M-Matt, what c-can I do?"

And damn him for stuttering. He's Spiderman. Practically known for his speech patterns, quipping more than any other hero/ But now? Right now, he was Peter Parker, a stuttering mess who was wracked with anxiety because *he can't lose Matt, too.*

"G-get the phone, i-in the drawer... Call Claire.."

Peter took a sharp breath, laying Matt's hand down and trying to control his vocal chords so they wouldn't mess up, wouldn't display him as weak. "Okay, on it!" he tried with fake enthusiasm, hoping that he could manage to calm Matt down with his tone. "You're gonna be okay, Matty. I promise, you can't escape me this easily."

Matt chuckled, and then groaned and wheezed in pain. Peter felt guilty at causing him that trouble as he rushed to pull the bedside drawer open. His eyes widened when there was just braille-covered paper, nothing remotely phone shaped. He rummaged and threw the paper everywhere, just in case it was hidden underneath or something, but came up empty. His blood runs cold.

“M-Matt? I don’t see it in here.”

He doesn’t know who Claire is. Matt, Foggy, and Karen all have never mentioned her. But for Matt to have a burner phone with her contact in it? A phone that Matt called out for, despite bleeding out on his covers? Peter could only deduce that she was someone important. Someone who could help. And the bitter feeling of failure washed over him as he turned to Matt with frantic eyes, waiting for more instructions.

Peter frightfully turns when he doesn’t get a response. Matt’s eyes are closed, and he jolts towards his guardian again. He throws himself onto the empty space on the bed as carefully as he can and grabs hold of the man’s shoulder, shaking him while trying to remain gentle. He receives a groan, and feels as a bit of tension in his shoulders dissipates.

He peer down at him, and Matt’s eyelids peel open once again; brown meeting brown. *Be calm for Matt. If he knows I’m freaking out, he’ll console me instead of focusing on himself.* “Matt, the phone isn’t in the drawer.” The attorney grunts, mind too foggy to comprehend the severity of the situation quick enough.

Luckily, it seemed to have clicked after a few anticipated breaths. Matt furrowed his eyebrows before the metaphorical light bulb went off in his head. “Crap, f-forgot. F-False bottom, kid.”

Peter rushed back into action and felt around in the drawer, fingers making purchase on a small hole in the back. He didn’t allow himself to smile, to feel a sense of relief, as he pulled the hidden layer up to reveal a silver burner phone. He quickly flips it open and tries not to think about the ancient piece of technology in his hands as he scrolls to find the contacts, opening up the app.

The name “Claire” stares at him, being the only one in the phone. Peter hastily jams his finger on the call button, the nervous energy once again encasing him.

He clasps the phone to his ear, listening as the dial tone rings and attempts to drown out the sound of rain hitting all around the building.

When she picks up, Peter flinches. Without a second to spare, he hears a female voice bark out “what the hell did you do now?”

If Peter wasn't absolute *terrified* about the next few minutes, he probably would've just hung up on the scary voice. But as Matt groans in the background, Peter builds up his resolve. Finds the same courage he uses almost daily when jumping in front of guns, stopping moving vehicles. He opens his mouth to answer, Spiderman taking over. “Hi, this isn't Matt. My name is Peter Parker-- Matt got injured fighting as Daredevil last night and is actively bleeding out on his bed, and I don't trust my small knowledge of medical skills to save him. Can you help, or am I wasting my time calling?”

Something falls on the other end. Or rather, is dropped. There's shuffling for a few seconds, before Claire cuts back in. “I'll be there in five. Keep me on the phone until then, alright Parker?” He nods as he loses feeling in his fingers, numbness taking over and body going on autopilot. “You hear me?” she asked, demanding his attention.

Peter cleared his throat, before making his way back to Matt. “Yeah, loud and clear.” There's the unmistakable sound of the Kitchen's streets in the background, mixed with the unrhythmic sound of rain pounding on the pavement, telling him that Claire was on her way. “Alright, and remember, you're his anchor right now. You freak out, he freaks out. And a bruised and bloody Matt who's freaking out isn't what anyone needs.”

Suddenly, it made sense as to why Matt had a specific phone for Claire. The obvious reasons were there; she didn't question Daredevil. She worried about Matt, and had enough knowledge medically to decide that she could be of help. But also, she could tell from the sound of Peter's voice how much Matt meant to him. How she could tell the severity of the question, and just *knew*. Knew that the strong facade he put on for her was just that. She knew that Peter was an internal mess, and knew that joking would help balance him out.

It reminded him of May.

He wondered if that was just a nurse thing.

True to her word, Claire was running up the apartment stairs five minutes later, soaking wet. She hung up on him and rushed through the unlocked door, only pausing in the living room to set her stuff down and start digging for proper supplies. Peter came out of the bedroom covered in blood, hands shaking as he properly greeted the woman.

Claire looked up at his voice, and then promptly froze.

“Oh my God, you’re May Parker’s nephew.”

It was Peter’s turn to freeze up, eyes widening. “Did- how, did you know her?” he asked, stumbling over his words. She seemed to shake herself out of her stupor, going back to what she was doing before her revelation. “Now isn’t the time. Right now I need you to take a shower and change into some other clothes. I’ll take care of Matt, don’t worry.”

“But, I want to help!” He exclaimed, for the first time that day anger coursing through his veins. “You can’t just bench me like that!”

Claire must have grabbed all of the materials she needed, because she stood up with various medical supplies tucked into the corners of her arms. “Yes, I can. And yes, I did. There isn’t much you can do anymore, other than hover while I stitch up that idiot in the other room. So for everyone’s sake, please, just take care of yourself first. I’m sure Matt would appreciate that more.”

Damn her for pulling the pity card, Peter thought.

Begrudgingly, he nodded. She gave him a pitiful smile, before turning and closing the door to Matt’s bedroom.

The last thing Peter heard was her addressing Matt.

“So, dumbass, seems like you’ve got some storytelling to do.”

Claire spent the remainder of the day locked up with Matt in his bedroom, tending to his wounds and taking care of his ruined sheets.

Peter went out on patrol. He couldn’t stand to hear the sucked in gasps of air that escaped Matt’s mouth, the complete and utter pain he was in obvious.

He didn't go home that night, either. He ventured to Queens and layed on familiar roofs, looking at the sky. Trying with all his might to see the stars.

The streets were peaceful, shockingly. Maybe it had something to do with the rain earlier. Maybe the universe was finally taking pity on him. He couldn't hear any criminal activity for miles. Only families inside their homes, laughing at one thing or another.

It made his heart ache as he remembered Matt, whose heartbeat was too far for him to distinguish anymore.

He never told Matt about his day at school, and for some reason, that hurt more than anything else.

Peter talked to Karen, his AI, throughout the night. As the sun began to rise and the sky started lighting up once more, he made his way throughout Queens, patrolling once more.

“You're serious about graduating early, aren't you?”

Peter was in Principal Morita's office, a determined look on his face. Morita must have caught it, because he sighed and pushed up his glasses. “Mr. Parker, while I'm not doubting your intellectual level, are you sure you're ready for this? It's been, what, three days since you've come back? Four? Either way, it's such a short amount of time.”

He had a whole speech prepared. An entire speech that he planned the night before during the lull of the night, when guilt started creeping into his subconscious. Peter planned out every point, every sub point, and every example down to the T, something he had picked up from watching Matt in court. Anything Morita tried throwing at him, he had at least twelve different ways to counter.

Which is why, without missing a beat, he instantly replied.

“I understand your concern about me moving too fast, sir. But with all due respect, I'm already far

beyond what I need to be at. I'm emancipated, in case you don't know. Considered a legal adult in all accounts except age. Staying at school will only hinder my progress in the world, and evidently all points in my life. As you've commented on my intellectual level, I feel the need to point out that I believe this is the best option in all accounts. Ranging from the publicity that Midtown would get from not only having someone my age graduate early, but also from someone whose going to amount to something large come from such a prestigious school. I'll certainly bring in more students once they find out where I was taught, won't I?"

Morita smiled.

Peter knew he won him over.

"Alright, Parker. You've impressed me. You have two hours before you take the test needed to see if you're able to go. That's the earliest, of course. You can opt for a later date--"

"I'll take it. No need for studying if I'm trying to show off, right?" He asks, cocky smile on his lips.

Principal Morita blinks at the suaveness that carried around Peter, oozed out of every pore. The commanding aura that emitted from him, demanding attention without asking. His smile, the way his eyes twinkled with mischief.

He's reminded of a press conference he watched the other night, one featuring Tony Stark. Oddly, the similarities between the two men were insane, almost staggeringly so.

But he knew there wasn't any connection between the billionaire playboy, and the absolute genius of a kid in front of him.

"Of course, Mr. Parker. I'll call you back when it's ready. And I wish you the best of luck."

For months, Peter was alone.

He lived alone. Worked alone. Survived on his own.

Nobody knew. Nobody cared.

When Spiderman got beaten down, Peter always got back up. He didn't have a helping hand there for him, and arguably, he didn't need it. Sometimes.

And then Matt came around.

He introduced things to Peter that the teen had previously forgotten about.

A home, where it was always warm with laughter and smiles.

Friends, ones who seeked him out and were content in his company.

A job, where he could show up happy and leave late, determined to do better the next day.

A reason to smile.

An incentive to be better, *do* better. As both Spiderman and Peter Parker.

Matt gave him freedom, one that he lost in the days following May's demise.

So of course, it was fitting that Peter knew he would be alone in taking this test, too.

No texts from Matt wishing him luck, because the man was currently twelve different types of drugged out of his mind. Foggy didn't know that he was making this major step today, and Karen knew nothing of the matter. The last she had hears, he was just debating.

But for those months alone, Peter had survived.

And he knew he would survive this alone, too.

“I-I... I can’t believe it...” Morita muttered, eyes wide. The secretary was gazing over his shoulder, mouth open in shock. Peter sat idly in front of them, wringing his hands together under the desk.

In their hands was his test.

His perfect, aced, test.

“These... These equations aren’t even going to be taught to the seniors! How did you know how to solve them?!” The secretary (who Peter thinks is named Ms. Ball) asked him, completely baffled. He just shrugged bashfully, not daring to look at them. “It was easy. I learned that stuff over a year ago.”

Morita’s hands made a ‘thunk’ on the desk as they dead weighted, displaying the 100% in bright red at the top right.

“My God...” he muttered once more, Peter’s super hearing being the only way he heard it. Morita was looking at him as if he was an anomaly; a living question. How did he do it? Get torn down mentally, manage to miss countless lessons in school, ones that he wouldn’t be able to make up in the span of a few days.

How had he made a perfect score?

Principal Morita was once more reminded of Tony Stark, and staring into the warm brown eyes of the relaxed teenager in front of him, the one who couldn’t see the significance of his pure brilliance, and it made sense.

Somehow, it made sense.

Both of the men had lost everything, and had gained much more knowledge than anyone else in their shoes. They thrived. Grew from the pain, intellect skyrocketing with the burden of crisis.

Pain bread maturity, a maturity typically acquired by age. And early maturity lead to smarter decisions; smarter choices.

Just... Smartness, he thought dumbly.

Peter gave them a cheeky smile, removing his hand from his finger pretzel to scratch the back of his head.

“So... Can I... Y’know, go?”

Morita cleared his throat.

Peter Parker was going to be great one day.

High school wasn’t where he needed to be.

“Go on, kid. And don’t come back.”

When he leaves, he passes Michelle, Flash, and Ned.

Word spread fast about his accomplishment, no doubt the leak coming from a certain secretary. The looks he received were reminiscent of the ones from his first day back.

They were easier to handle this time around.

Peter passed by Michelle, Flash and Ned.

They were all gaping at him.

He didn't look at them.

He didn't need to.

"Pooter."

Silence.

"...Pooter."

Peter tried his hardest to continue to look down at his tea, mixing in a little bit of sugar to ease the bitterness.

And then, he felt the weight of a paper tissue hitting the back of his head.

"Pooter."

"For *fucks sake*," Peter finally broke, turning around to look at a *very* high and *very* out of his mind Matt. Matt, who started cracking up at the exasperation that coated every bit of the teen in front of him.

And then, after laughing, promptly sucking in a gasp of air as he pulled at his new stitches.

"Uh-huh. Look what you've done, Matty. You've gone and hurt yourself again."

Matt stuck out his tongue, wrapping his arms around his midsection.

Peter rolled his eyes, taking a sip of his warm cup. He was still waiting for the man to realize that he was home early, so that he could casually bring up the accomplishment he made earlier.

But looking at the battered attorney laying on the couch, zip up hoodie covering the palms of his hands and sweatpants pooling at his feet, Peter wasn't sure if he should break the news now or later.

Matt sneezed, somehow managing to sound adorable doing so. And then he proceeded to continue to look like a sad kitten, rather than the full grown adult he was.

Warmth spread in Peter's chest as he watched the struggling Devil overcome the pain medication running through his veins.

And then,

“Spooderman.”

And it was crushed.

Peter walked over to the couch Matt was draped across, nudging his feet so that there would be enough room for him to sit down. Once he got situated, he sipped on his tea. Debated on how to tell Matt.

The man nudged him with his calve. Grunted, and then nudged him again.

“Spoo...Pete.. What'r'u th'nkin?” he tried to ask, furrowing his eyebrows and trying to look at his tongue. Of course, dopy Matt is still worrisome Matt.

Peter smiled, and turned to look at Matt. Somehow, the man looked back.

“I took the test, passed with flying colors. No more high school for me, Matty.”

He watched as the words circulated in Matt's brain. Watched as they took a shape, took form, and finally made sense. Watched the utter delight come across Matt's face, giant beaming smile directed towards him.

Matt threw his arms out, cheering quietly while doing jazz hands. And then, despite his injuries, sat up to wrap Peter into a hug. "Oh my gosh, Matt!" he yelled out, laughing at the man went slack, going back to his earlier position of laying down all while dragging Peter down with him. Luckily, his cup made it to the ground safely.

Peter didn't dare fight the drugged up devil, instead shifting so that he wasn't lying down on any of Matt's injuries. Matt apparently had other plans, because he just turned on his side so that he was facing the trapped kid in his arms, ruffling his hair.

"Pruud. I'm pruum'y'eh."

Peter continued laughing, reveling in the moment.

He had Matt.

Matt, who was proud of him.

He had a home.

A place he could come back to, and revel in.

Friends.

Who cared for him.

A family.

One that loved him unconditionally.

And lastly, Peter had a reason to go on.

After all these months, Peter could finally say that he knew he would be okay.

—••—••—••—••—••—

Days and weeks blended together, and Tony was spiraling.

He couldn't eat. He couldn't sleep. He could hardly work. He was confined to the Tower, left wandering aimlessly around the hallways. When he wasn't attending board meetings in which he was physically present, but otherwise entirely absent.

All he could think about was Peter.

Tony blamed himself for so many things. Pepper almost dying. The Accords. Sending the Avengers on the run. Ultron. Hell, for selling weapons and filling in the shoes of his father. But those are always in the back of his mind, never really incapacitating him and preventing him from doing anything drastic.

But this.

This was different.

And he didn't know how or why. Maybe it was because Peter is only a kid. A kid who managed to break through all of the walls that Tony had built-up, the ones that left everyone who saw them stumped. A kid who lit up at the aspect of astrophysics and little puppies. The kid who made Tony consider fatherhood, despite absolutely loathing the aspect of dealing with a drooling, pooping, baby.

...The worst part about him spiraling?

Nobody was there to catch him.

Because that person, unknowingly, was Peter. And he pushed him away to save his own damn self.

(In retrospect, it only harmed him.)

(Severely.)

But the public doesn't know of his troubles. They still see him at conferences, hear his classic witty remarks. See the bags under his eyes and speculate that he's working on a new and improved suit.

He's not sure if he's thankful for that or not.

Tony called Stan a few times. The man always answered, even when Tony would glance at the clock for the first time in ages and see that it was an ungodly hour.

He had become something of a therapist. Stan listened to Tony's conflict, and gave him a riddle mixed with yet another extended metaphor that placated Tony's endless mantra of self loathing for a few hours, instead shifting his focus on trying to decode the cryptic messages.

They would always end their conversations with a simple "thank you," and "remember: you'll do the right thing. You always do, Tony."

Their talks were the one light in the endless darkness that seemed to follow the engineer everywhere he went. The thing that kept him floating amiss the sea of despair.

One day, one of the many that he had let be wasted with dark thoughts and little progress on his actual work, FRIDAY told him things needed to change. *He* needed to change.

It's a little sad when your AI tells you to do better, Tony realizes.

So he tries. He scarfs down an entire pizza slice, chugs enough sleeping medication to put a cow to sleep.

When he wakes two hours later to throw up the contents of his stomach, he isn't sure if he can call it progress.

But he still tries, and that's more than what he can say for a lot of things.

For what he can say to Peter.

And once more, his thoughts did their complete cycle. Thinking of familiar things; his deteriorating health, the next conference he'll have to go to. And of course, back to Peter.

It's always back to him.

At one point, FRIDAY must take pity on him. Which, all in itself, is pitiful. He was in his lab, staring at the schematics of a new Spiderman suit. An Iron Spider one. It could withstand blows better than the current suit, had six metal arms that protruded out of the back on command, and could even travel to space.

He rubbed the tracker in his hand with his thumb and pointer finger, eyes distant. Far off. His mind, far from home.

"Boss," her mechanical voice cut through the fog of his mind. "Might I suggest something, to help your behavior?"

Tony blinked, stopping his eyes from burning. Felt the ridges of coding in the thin white material. Sighed, and then shrugged. "Might as well baby girl, lay it on me."

"I would suggest you find Mr. Parker and reconcile with him."

Maybe it was the way she put it. So bluntly, so precise; exactly like an AI should be. But something broke inside of Tony. Some angsty part that bellowed deep within, told him it wasn't that easy.

Tony was reminded of something, in that moment.

When he was told by a college professor that he couldn't graduate two years only, he went around and did just that.

When his father told him that he wouldn't amount to anything, he turned around and built the legacy of Iron man.

When Nick Fury told him that he would never grow to be anything other than a narcissist, Tony proved him wrong by saving the world.

Tony Stark, when told one thing, always found a way to turn his situation around to prove them wrong.

The same thing must go for himself, if he follows that logic.

With his mind yelling at him, telling that it's pointless. Peter doesn't care, he's *gone*, because Tony shoved him away.

With his heart telling him that he's only going to get injured, that he can't take the pain again.

Tony chooses to go with his gut.

His gut, which was telling him that he couldn't let the best thing to ever happen to him walk away.

So Tony got up. Squared his shoulders. Headed for the kitchen, and grabbed an apple. Took a bite, and for the first time in God knows how long, didn't feel repulsed by the taste.

"FRI, get me information on the whereabouts of Peter Parker."

Midtown.

That's where FRIDAY led Tony.

She had run facial recognition across the internet, spying Peter in the background of two girls' shared picture. They posted it approximately thirty minutes ago, meaning that school was still open.

Peter would still be there.

For at least another minute or so.

Of course, Tony didn't get his hopes up. He had learned not to do that anymore. It would only make things worse when he was met with the ultimate disappointment that seemed to lurk at every corner. He wouldn't allow himself to feel relieved; not until he saw Peter's face.

Not until he could apologize.

Tony, being Tony, decided to go for a flashy Audi. One that screamed his name. One that would easily be pinpointed through the sea of other vehicles, all there to pick up their children.

Speaking of children, the first of them finally started to congregate out of the front doors of the building. Just as Tony had predicted, they stopped and stared at his expensive piece of machinery.

Once there was a sizeable crowd, Tony slipped on his sunglasses. Fixed his suit, adjusted the tie around his neck.

And then stepped out, leaning against his door as he scanned the student body.

All conversation seemed to stop as billionaire Tony Stark made his presence known. Nobody moved. Students coming out of the door looked confused, until they followed the eye line of their peers. Saw the vehicle, then its owner.

Finally, after what felt like years, a teenager said something.

“Holy mother of God, that’s *Tony Stark*. ”

On any other occasion, that would’ve been funny. Probably would’ve had Tony in tears, if he were honest. Because seriously, what kind of response was *that* ?

But he remembered his mission. Find Peter.

His head snapped to the kid, who seemed to shrink under his gaze.

“Hey, you. Yes you, mother of God kid. Come here.”

The teen looked around unsure, before swallowing and growing into a confident stance. One that didn’t match the quiver in his hands. He made his way to the passenger side of the door, before stopping. “Y-yes Mr. S-Stark?”

At that, he smiled. “I’m looking for a Peter Parker. You know of him?”

The teen’s eyes widened comically. *Guess that answers my question*. “P-Peter?” he asked, unbelievably. Tony quirked an eyebrow in lieu of an answer, before finally sighing. “Alright, what’s your name?”

“F-Flash Thompson, sir.”

God, what kind of name is that? Tony resisted the urge to roll his eyes behind his violet tinted glasses. “Alright, Flash. Give it to me straight. Did you, or did you not see Peter at school today? He’s been skipping out on his internship days, and with a mind like his, it’s starting to become a hindrance.”

If Flash could widen his eyes anymore, Tony was sure he would. Flash looked at the students behind him who were videoing nosily, before looking back at Tony. As if he were hating himself

for being the bearer of bad news.

A pit formed in Tony's stomach.

In the back of his head, he was laughing at himself. Of course, he played himself. Again. Why did he even bother? This was just a waste, there was no way that Peter-

"Peter- uh... He was at school. But he, kind of, you know." Flash scratched the back of his head, looking down. "Graduated?"

Silence.

Tony blinked.

Thought about the date.

Tried to remember a reasonable time to graduate.

Came blank.

And then,

"I'm sorry, what? He what?"

Flash shrank down again under his tone, wanting nothing more than to test the legitimacy of his nickname by fleeing away from the intense gaze of Tony Stark. Tony, who thought he was walking into a prank.

"He- he graduated early! Came back to school for all of t-three days before making the decision!" Flash stammered out, looking at Tony with earnest eyes. And then, with a clouded expression. "He passed the test with no wrong answers, like the genius he is..."

Coming to Midtown, Tony wasn't sure what he was expecting.

Despair, yeah. Maybe even unkindled fury. Possibly acceptance, along with gratitude and love.

Peter hating him.

Not hearing his apology.

Walking away.

Or....

Peter looking at him with those inquisitive eyes.

Answering his questions, no doubt having some of his own.

Hugging him.

But graduating early?

That was something Tony would've never expected.

Sure, he knew the kid was a boy wonder when it came to intelligence. He read college textbooks for fun, of course there would be a level of genius there that wouldn't be there with other students.

But last he checked, Peter had too much here at Midtown.

Valedictorian. His friend, what was his name again? Fred? Ted? Ned?

Ned!

Anyways, his friend Ned and that other one that started with an M. Peter had them, and they had been his main reason. He couldn't leave them. Not in a million years.

But as Tony scanned the crowd once more, and found a melancholy Ned along with an envious looking M-girl, something seemed to scream in his chest again.

Something drastic had to have happened between them.

Something drastic with Peter.

With that realization came an intense wave of protectiveness. Something that screamed at him, tore at all of his cells. Told him to find Peter. Make sure he was okay. Check on him, maybe even May while he was at it.

Because something was wrong, and for once, Tony wasn't thinking of himself when he came to the realization.

So he nodded in thanks, mouth parting slightly. Grabbed his door with numb fingers, and threw himself in the driver's seat.

"Where to, Boss?" FRIDAY asked, voice reverberating throughout the confined space.

Tony didn't know.

He didn't know.

I don't know.

"Just go, baby girl. When I think of where to go, I'll tell you."

So Tony pulled out of Midtown, leaving the baffled students behind. Merged with the other New

Yorkers travelling on the road, and got lost in the flow of traffic.

Because Tony didn't know where he needed to go.

All he had was a destination, and that was Peter.

Chapter End Notes

Please, feel free to leave comments and kudos!

They give me validation lmao.

(Speaking of, when did we hit 11,000 hits?? wow! Thank you so much, guys!)

Look At What We've Become (Who Were We, Anyways?)

Chapter Summary

And there, walking his way, was Peter Parker.

Chapter Notes

So more of a filler chapter than anything, since the next chapter is gonna be hefty with dialogue between the two.

But like, also I wanted to share the alternative titles to this chapter because they're all /so/ good and suggested by both myself and my wonderful beta (who does, in fact, deserve the entire world and so much more).

- Powerful, Powerless
- Shiver to That Broken Beat
- My Sins Are Calling Through The Door
- I'm Trying (To Hold It Down)
- Let Your Star Confuse Your Way
- Holes In My False Confidence
- What Kind Of Heart Doesn't Look Back
- Still I'm Searching For Something
- The Air I Would Kill To Breathe
- My Secrets Become Your Truth
- Hang My Head, Break My Heart

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Peter didn't really know what to do with himself.

Before, at around this time, he would usually be getting out of his last period and donning his Spidersuit. But now? Now the last thing he wanted to do was go on his normal routines.

Matt somehow managed to fall asleep, and a part of Peter blamed the medication. Speaking of, Peter turned to adjust the man so that he was in a more comfortable position that didn't put too much strain on his injuries.

It was the small things that helped, he supposed.

He walked to Matt's bedroom and grabbed the blanket still crumpled from the night, before trodding back and laying the cover gently over him. A happy noise filled the air as Matt snuggled deeper, unconsciously gripping at it and pulling it so that it was in front of his face, covering his mouth and nose.

And if someone asked Peter if he took a picture of the Devil of Hell's Kitchen cuddled up in a blanket?

Well, surely he'd deny it.

With that taken care of, Peter found himself chucking on a random sweatshirt, sighing in content when it covered his hands and turned them into sweater paws. Then, after checking the fluid in his web shooters, he made his way outside.

Something in the back of his head was telling him to take a walk. Clear his head, maybe. And almost as if he wasn't in control of his movements, Peter found himself doing just that.

Midtown. Walk to Midtown.

"Well," he muttered, rolling his eyes at his inner most desires in the moment, "guess I'm going to Midtown."

Tony didn't really know what to do with himself.

For all he knew, he was chasing a ghost. He had nothing to go off of, nowhere to go. Just a name, a name that was as elusive as the wind.

Searching for a specific face in the field of New Yorkers that passed in the middle of the day was, admittedly, above his levels. Even with his trained eyes, he knew that there was no way he could pinpoint Peter.

And then he remembered FRIDAY.

It was the small things that helped the most, he reasoned.

So he let FRIDAY take the wheel, carefully directing him through Midtown's traffic. Meanwhile, he was pulling up any recent pictures taken that had a familiar brown head in the background.

Because even as a genius, Tony knew the probability of him happening to stumble onto Peter was slim to none.

With the need to put his hands on the wheel, foot dancing along the pedals absent due to FRIDAY's self driving capabilities, Tony found that he had a lot of time to think.

To look, and to think.

He snorted, an involuntary smile breaking out on his face. What two basic human necessities, two things that he neither cared for or had a lot of time to do. And yet, that seems to be all he has been doing ever since Peter Parker left. Or more accurately, was pushed away.

"FRI, remind me to catch up with May after we find Pete. I have a few questions for her."

And then, FRIDAY hesitated. Which never really happens, so realistically it should've made Tony stop and realize something was wrong.

But he was kind of busy.

Looking, and thinking.

"Yes, boss." She answered, albeit quietly.

Oblivious to the volume, he continued to watch the groups walking by, and considered if looking

on foot would be better.

Peter genuinely had no idea what he was doing.

But also, that was okay. Because going on a walk was nice. It gave him time to do something rhythmic, something he's been able to do since he was a small child.

Each stride he took was prideful, full of purpose; despite the lack of destination. The vibrations were lost to him, just as the quiet '*thud*'s of his feet hitting the pavement were lost to the crowd he was currently surrounded in.

He was just there. Going through the motions, never really thinking about anything in his path.

Peter, distantly, was thankful for this fact.

"Why?" He pretended someone asked him.

Well.

Because his mind was currently playing scrabble with memories, bringing up a specific thought and then barreling on to another similar one.

He kicked a pebble, and was transported to another time when he did it out of his kidly angst, years and years ago. When he looked up and saw a local flower shop, he remembered when he gave a bouquet to Pepper Potts for her birthday.

And *boy*, did that name bring back some memories.

Peters mind, naturally, was drawn back to her former boss. Tony Stark.

Tony, the man with a plan. The man whose plan didn't involve a seventeen year old kid. The man who brought Peter to a state of happiness. Of acceptance over his uncle's death. The man who single-handedly saved Peter in and out of the suit countless times, yet still vehemently stated that it was nothing.

Peter found himself turning a corner, legs wandering and taking him on an adventure.

Adventure.

Ironically, that also reminded him of Tony.

Maybe it was because the man always seemed to have something about him. Something wrong, or just off. Constantly working on a problem, attempting to find a solution.

Peter wondered what the problem was with him; what required the solution to be cutting him out?

He also wondered if the reason why his thoughts kept on lingering on the man was because everything in his life had been solved. Everything but his absence.

A sigh escaped his lips as he took another turn, where traffic died down and he could spy a plain neighborhood. The homely aura of the street threw him off for a split second, before shrugging and trusting his feet to guide him to where he was supposed to be.

Tony genuinely had no idea what he was doing.

Searching all over New York for a teenager? Someone whose residence was unknown to him, how much they've changed in his absence, hell, if they were even in Midtown anymore! For all he knew, Peter and May could've moved to Hell's Kitchen.

He averted his eyes for a few moments to pull up a hologram of New York, using the Spidey Watch community to trace out his pattern. In that time, he cursed the fact that he couldn't just pull up the data from Karen.

And, well...

There wasn't a specific pattern, really.

Spiderman had been everywhere. Dividing up his time, hitting each section and never neglecting. He wasn't really spotted in one specific area more than the others, helping Tony's search by only telling him that Pete hadn't gone any farther than the state.

Which, you know, he could have deduced on his own.

So once more he sighed, letting his eyes wander over the dwindling crowds of New Yorkers, traffic finally clearing as FRIDAY drove to a more neighborhood-esque area.

God, what was he even going to say to Peter if he ever found him? I'm sorry? I was an asshole who thought that pushing you away would preserve both of us, only to realize later that that was a mistake?

Just thinking about what to say sent a cursed thrill of hope soaring up his spine, lighting up all these different centers that tried to elevate him. But of course, ever the realist, Tony knew that the hope was at best, false. The odds that he'd find Peter today of all days was slim to none. A once in a fourteen million possibility.

But still... That's one chance. One chance where he can try to make amends. To tell him he's sorry, get his bearings out, and even possibly get Peter to forgive him. Let them go back to before, or as close to it as possible.

Longingly, he remembered all the times where Peter would come over and they would work on suit upgrades. The teen would be bustling around the lab, talking as fast as a machine gun about his day and recalling 'missions' as Spiderman.

Or the times when Peter would work himself to exhaustion, and accidentally fall asleep at Tony's

side despite his best efforts to not do that. When Tony would chuckle and find himself wrapping an arm around the Spiderling, carrying him to a spare bedroom and tucking him in.

(Those memories sent a warm feeling in his chest. Mainly because on those nights Peter would remind Tony of himself, with his neglect towards his well-being because he was too worried about others. Those nights those nights seemed to be exactly what he envisioned having a kid would be like. Bringing them to bed, caring for them... Sadly, Pepper disagreed all those months ago.)

And of course, he remembered the aftermaths of all the battles. Where Peter was hurt, yet tried to refuse help. Said he could handle himself, that Tony shouldn't waste his time on a clumsy teenager like himself.

But Tony knew. He knew that the injuries acquired were from saving others. Making sure someone didn't get hit with a devastating blow, because Peter knew he could handle the pain better than a non enhanced individual. And he also knew that Peter's methods of tending his wounds were lackluster at best, only consisting of making sure it wasn't infected, wrapping it up, and then either curling around an ice cream pint and watching TV or staying hunched over his table doing homework.

Just remembering these simple things was a reminder to him of how badly he fucked up.

But it also solidified his plans. He needed to tell Peter everything. How he felt, why he reacted the way he did, why--

"Boss!" FRIDAY exclaimed, drawing his attention.

He jumped in his seat, arm snapping to his chest ready to deploy his armor in case of an attack. "Jesus, FRI! What in the hell--"

His words tampered off as he looked to the side of the road.

Staring at one specific person.

A ghost in all ways that count, except physical.

There, walking his way, was Peter Parker.

Peter realized something. Something that had him jolting in place, losing his footing for a fraction of a second before his left foot pounded back on pavement.

With all of his thoughts focused on Tony, he realized that there was an emotion linked to the man.

Not the usual residual sadness over him. Not even the anger and resentment for all those months of no contact. Peter realized that he missed the man.

And what kind of beauty is that? All this pain, yet he still missed the way Tony's calloused fingers would run through his hair late at night. He missed the way Tony would bustle around the kitchen, recreating one of his mother's Italian recipes just for him. He missed the comfort that engulfed him in battle, when he would hear the tell tale whine of repulsors and see a streak of red and gold fly above him.

Peter hoped this wasn't a sick form of Stockholm Syndrome. That would suck.

Belatedly, he realized that he was lost in his thoughts once more. When he came back to, he noticed that the street he was on was bare of any pedestrians. It was only him, and a few cars on the side of the road in front of houses.

And one expensive looking Audi, stopping and parking a few feet in front of him.

He felt himself make a confused face, wondering how in the hell someone was able to afford such a luxury piece of machinery, until something clicked in his mind. The color; dark green. Like the trees in a forest. The angles shifted between the rays of light, making the color appear black in some places.

He knew that Audi. He helped repair that Audi.

The door opened, and Peter felt all of his breath leave his lungs.

—••—••—••—••—••—

Tony realized something. Something that caused his breath to hitch and his movements to still. That person, that man, that *kid* that was walking this way with his head down, was *Peter*.

He thanked all the possible Gods out there for granting him this small sliver of happiness. Someone had to have been watching over him to allow him to find Peter throughout all of New York. There was no possible way that there wasn't some kind of cosmic deity pulling strings, managing to cross their paths.

"FRI..." He licked his lips, words failing him. He tried once more, feeling his mouth quiver. "FRIDAY, pull over."

Of course, she obeyed.

Tony's eyes never left Peter. He drank in all of the changes, all of the things he missed over the past few months. The way he carried himself, strong and determined. Someone who was used to being beat down, but always got back up. The way his shoulders squared out, filling his form and making him look less like a gangly teenager and more like a super soldier. How his eyes danced over the car, carrying this heaviness that wasn't there before. A weight that had been placed on him, a burden, one that he didn't let define him.

Peter looked... He looked nothing like the kid Tony knew.

Besides the obvious genetic things that couldn't be changed, everything else was different. Like Peter had been through hell and came back ruling the underworld. A warrior in all ways that counted.

Oddly enough, something in Tony felt pinched at the thought.

He watched the recognition flash behind those brown eyes, saw the way they widened..

Suddenly, the car felt stifling. He couldn't be here anymore. He needed to be out there, out where Peter was.

He needed to be with Peter, let him know that he was here.

Tony grasped at the door and pushed it open, mind forgetting all of its previous plans on what to say.

.....

The world must either love or hate Peter. That's truly one of the only explanations for this.

He truly can't decide, because if it was love, then *Jesus Christ* it's a little late for that. But if it hated Peter, then maybe that's why it placed him and Tony in this exact location, at this exact time, staring at each other.

Like they couldn't believe this was reality.

Peter couldn't help himself. His eyes danced over every bit of Tony, anything he could see. His calloused hands that were gripping the car door as if they were the sole things holding him up. Worry lines on his face, a type of residual sadness that wasn't there before. His mouth was parted, jaw slack. It seemed that the shock was mutual.

His portable arc reactor was on his chest, but it wasn't lit up.

He felt his muscles tense up under his sweatshirt, unsure of what to do. And truthfully, that kind of described everything about him.

Describing his heart as pumping harshly wasn't accurate. Peter's heart teamed up with the rest of his organs to form a mariachi band, beating to a rapid pulse that thrummed under his skin.

Emotions were fleeting; swinging by too fast to be anything discernible.

Peter couldn't form any words. Maybe this was what shock felt like.

He watched as Tony moved his mouth, speaking words that had yet to come out. Watched as the older man swallowed, and tried again.

____...____...____...____...____...____

Tony found his voice first.

“Pete?”

One simple word. One word that broke whatever delusion his mind tried to make up by telling him Peter wasn't actually there. That he was just a figment of his imagination, a way for his mind to cope with the loss.

But Peter responded.

He clenched his hands and swallowed his words, blinking. As if he couldn't believe the same thing Tony was lost on.

Peter was actually here.

Oh my God, Peter is actually here.

Like a slap to the face, Tony's world expanded. Tunnel vision gone, he could see everything around him. Hear the dogs that continuously barked around them, in the yards of the homes. Feel a sheen of sweat form on his head, sun beating down relentlessly on his person.

Peter blinked again, before taking a tentative step forward. Not close enough to be in reach of the car, and not far enough to be able to run away without Tony catching up. Belatedly, he noticed the

subtle shaking of the kids hands.

His own clutched the door harder, unwilling to make the same motions.

“T..” Peter got out, as if testing his name. Something fluttered in his chest at the simple letter. He didn’t realize how much he missed Peter’s voice until now.

“Tony?”

—————•••—————•••—————•••—————•••—————

Why were his hands shaking?

Peter mentally commanded them to stop. In all honesty, he shouldn't've expected that to do anything.

But his hands shaking were the least of his problems. If he could drag his attention away from them for longer than two seconds, he could count at least six.

The main one being Tony Stark standing a few feet away from him.

After all these months. All of the suffering and isolation, wishing for the man to be there. To card his hand through his hair once more and tell him things were going to be okay when he was banged up and bleeding in that old warehouse. All he had done to come to terms that Tony would never come, and he magically re-appears?

Peter is sure that if he was anyone else, they would’ve laughed.

Because what a precarious situation this seems to be, isn’t it? He happens to take a walk, and Tony magically runs into him. After all this time, it took a single walk for them to be reunited.

A part of him really does want to laugh. Another wants to cry. And a dark part of him wants to run away.

Talking will only lead to pain.

He learned that when Tony kicked him out.

As cruel as it is, Peter allows his emotions to run rampant. Every single one, but hope. Because he shouldn't hope for this. For things to go back to how they were before. Because logically he knows they can't, not with Matt filling in the role Tony was destined to take, not with May gone, not with-

Tony takes a step closer. And then another.

Peter finds himself moving too. Weird.

One thing lead to another, and suddenly he was in arms length of Tony. Close enough to smell the classic characteristic of him. Motor oil, coffee, a hint of blueberries, and the barely present scent of salt. Ocean water? Tears?

He didn't know. He was too busy being flung through memory lane, the sheer smell of Tony alone sending his senses into overdrive; wanting to map out the scent in case he'll never be able to be wrapped around the comforting aura once more.

This close, he could see the tiredness that weighed on the man. His shoulders were strained under his suit jacket, resignation seeping from his bones. But resignation of what?

Probably the same thing, if Peter had to guess.

And then it dawned on him that they probably looked absolutely insane.

Tony's Audi alone would have drawn attention. Afterall, not many New Yorkers can say they own

such a top of the line car. Especially not anyone in a neighborhood like this. And then, you know. Tony Stark making an appearance. And talking to a kid. Or teenager, but details shmetails.

And the fact that they were just staring at each other.

Peter cleared his throat, which snapped Tony out of the trance he was in. “What are you doing here?” He asked, watching in dismay as shock once more washed over Tony’s face before it was steeled away.

“Looking for you.”

...Admittedly, not what Peter was expecting. So he thinks it’s justified that his first response is to recoil slightly with a grimace, asking “why?”

And wow, what a kicker. Tony looked as if he had been stabbed in the abdomen. He took his own step back, head shaking with his eyes drawn to the ground. Like that simple word held more weight than anything he’d faced.

He looked back up, missing Peter’s eyes. Instead, focusing on the area behind his shoulder. “Wh..” He stuttered on the word, as if his brain is trying to kick start again. “What do you mean, why? I haven’t seen you in, God, *months*. And anywhere I looked, you weren’t there. When did you move, and what’s with the suit tracker, kid?”

Tony, the billionaire, playboy, philanthropist, *Iron Man*, sounded so *lost*. Absolutely broken, as if he had been pulling straws and he was on the last one. It physically pained Peter to hear the quieted version of an outspoken man, hear the way his breath clinged onto every word.

The amount of turmoil that went on in those months... What happened to Tony that changed him this much?

Tony was pathetic.

He knew he was. The grandeur that usually was laced in his words was gone, replaced with a harrowing type of sorrow, one carved out of years of abuse and neglect. His usual Stark manner was gone.

It was like he was a shell of the man he used to be.

Searching for Parker had taken everything out of him. It stripped him of who he used to be, and all he had was the blame directed towards him. Afterall, this all started because he had another one of his brilliant plans, which consisted of chasing everyone out of his life to be less trouble.

How ironic, isn't it? That he pushed everyone away so that he wouldn't have to worry about anyone, and they wouldn't have to worry about him. Yet, here he is, with nobody in his corner and all of his worries focused on a kid.

And the simple question. The one word, tilted upwards in pitch directed towards him.

"Why?"

Tony felt something shatter. He didn't know what, but it echoed through his head like church bells.

The childish question was sending Tony in a spiral that only truly lasted for a few seconds, but felt like hours. Who was he if he made one of the most vital piece in his life question why he wanted to see them?

He knew he fucked up. But that just solidified it.

Peter had yet to answer his questions. Instead, he was gazing at Tony with a too inquisitive look. As if dissecting him. And hell, maybe he was. The kid was a genius, he could probably read him like the morning newspaper. It wasn't like he was trying to hide his emotions, either.

In the back of his mind, he knew that it was wrong. He was unraveled and exposed emotionally in front of someone, someone who he had come to lose. In all these months, he hadn't come to feel this much in this short amount of time, let alone have someone see him like this. His suffering had been silent, hidden under snark and invention reveals.

He didn't have any of that now. Just the cruel and harsh reality.

Remember, Stark men are made of iron.

“You really don't know, do you?”

Tony sighed at both the reminder from his deceased father and the loaded question from his not-kid. Peter was looking at him with pain filled eyes, body stiff and guarded. A position Tony has only seen when he's in the suit, ready to diffuse a hostage situation. Ready for anything to come; ready to leave without a second's notice.

He shook his head to clear his mind, and to wipe all the pitiful emotions off of his face. Replace them with cool indifference like he had been doing for years. Straightened up, stopped slouching. Became the Tony Stark that the public saw.

That Tony Stark wasn't seen as weak. He didn't let go of the best things in his life.

“No kid, I don't. Not whatever you're referring to.” Just like that, he was back. Back to normal, or as close to it. Peter saw the shift and blinked owlishly, before steeling himself in the same way Tony did.

They really were too alike.

Peter sighed a resigned sigh.

If he hadn't seen the vulnerability practically painted over Tony's face, he probably wouldn't have believed that the man truly had no idea about his aunt passing. The start of it all.

But he watched as Tony broke down and built himself up, like the engineer he was. The absolute transformation that he made in a few seconds that completely disregarded any previous notions was astounding. And then the snark was back, and Peter could almost trick himself into believing that they were back to how they were months ago.

The ghost-like look in Tony's eyes told him otherwise.

A part of him didn't want to blame Tony for anything. It was obvious he was suffering like Peter was, just on a different level. While Peter went through emotional and physical suffering, he just went through the former. But at the same time, the fact that Peter was suffering at the absolute level he was, was because Tony wasn't there to help.

Maybe this could've been like a cheesy, popular story. His aunt dies, and Tony steps in and adopts him. Nurture him through his hard times, opens up about his own. Maybe Peter would've been able to prosper as Spiderman in that time. Learned things he couldn't before. Things about what it's like to have a big family; one that consisted of superpowered beings. What it felt like to have a father figure, one that wouldn't die.

But this isn't a story. This is Peter's life, and he'd be damned if he ever got such a happy ending.

In his reality, May is dead and Tony was gone for the suffering. Peter hit rock bottom and managed to find a shovel and go further. He mourned by himself and learned just how far he could push himself before he broke.

He did it all by himself.

And then of course Matt came. Matt stepped in when Peter couldn't get up by himself, and metaphorically stuck his hands under Peter's armpits and heaved him to his feet. Taught him how to laugh again. How to smile. How to feel anything other than despair and other heavy feelings that left him feeling like Atlas.

...Where was Tony during all of that?

What was he doing?

So yeah, he still felt a twinge of anger towards the engineer. Even if Tony had been suffering, it

was his choice to do it by himself. Peter didn't get that choice.

"What were you *doing*?" He asked, sounding exasperated. "This entire time, where were you? Did you just come to seek me out when you realized that you could benefit from me again?" Peter couldn't help it. He was *hurt*. And of course, Tony was there to take the heat of his pain.

Tony, to his credit, only pursed his lips. Didn't give an answer, because he knew that an answer wasn't what Peter was looking for. No, he was more in line of looking for a reprieve. Something to reduce the amount of turmoil that happened to rear its ugly head after so many weeks of recovery and acceptance.

He was doing *so well*. Why the sudden regression of emotions?

The engineer pointed to his car behind him half heartedly. Moved his eyes to look around at the houses with people snooping through the blinds, recording. "Look, Pete. How about we go somewhere else to discuss this. Somewhere less... Exposed to the public."

Truly, Peter should've taken the hint. Tony was offering him a way out of the public eye, giving him the option of one-on-one time where their business couldn't be spread online. Because if you're spotted with Tony Stark, teenager or not, chances are you'll be swamped with nosy reporters trying to discover your relationship. And judging by the amount of time they've just spent standing, Peter had a hunch that his face was probably plastered on at least two different social media apps.

He was still reluctant, however.

That felt like a right that was given to him. He wasn't as gullible as before, when he would follow everything Tony told him like it was his last words. Peter wasn't that young and caught up in hero worship anymore, wasn't enticed with the possibility of Iron Man seeking out his attention. Now he was able to question things. Motives.

He squinted his eyes. "Go where," he asked, because he wasn't going to blindly jump in the car with a man he has only seen on television for the past half year. Tony wasn't expecting the small bout of rebellion from the younger male judging by how his shoulders stiffened ever so slightly.

The cogs turning in his head were so loud, Peter could almost swear that he heard them. Clearly, things weren't thought out. That notion made things a little better for the teen; that Tony didn't have a prerequisite for him. It showed that he was just as lost as Peter on what to do, and that he's at least willing to try to fix things.

Maybe this could be salvaged.

“Drive around, probably.” Tony casually answered, fingers twitching. Despite his cunning exterior that he managed to build, he was still flawed in all the ways that mattered. His hands still moved when his legs didn’t want to, his eyes were still filled with emotion that were usually hidden behind glasses. Peter could tell he didn’t want to be outside anymore, but still Peter was waiting for the other shoe to drop. “Maybe stop off at the tower. Like...” He hesitated, looking at Peter before looking behind him. Avoiding eye contact. “Like old times.” He lamely finished in a hushed voice.

Wasn’t that a slap in the face?

A cold reminder of what was lost and what could be found. Old times that were lost, but tradition still stands. New times that can grow and thrive from the forgotten memories.

Spending a little more time with Tony was having more pros than cons.

But he had to make one thing clear first. “Not like old times.” He told him in a determined voice. One that would have never been directed towards the man in a casual situation like this. One that showed just how much things had changed. “We’ll never be back to that. We can only grow from there, and hope we don’t make the same mistakes as before. That’s not saying that things will move forward after this day, though. I don’t know if I’m ready to be let back in your life like I’m some long lost toy you only play with every now and then.”

Tony nodded once more, looking sullen. “God, kid. I’m so sorry for all of this.” He wiped his hands on his face, before gesturing to his audi once more. “Is that saying that you’re willing to at least talk to me?”

Peter thought of Matt, who was probably still drugged up on their couch. Wondered what he would do, what he would want Peter to do.

(Matt would want him to be happy. Of course he would. So naturally, he would probably tell Peter to follow what his mind told him, because his heart could easily be swayed.)

“Don’t apologize. There’s no point to it other than quelling your thoughts.” Peter told him, before walking past him and to the passenger side. Maybe it was a little harsh, but a part of him found the satisfaction at dishing that bit of logic towards Tony. “Also, there’s currently a very protective

devil at my place who doesn't know where I'm at, so let's not take that long."

At the confused look he got, Peter finally found it in himself to crack a smile.

Tony got in the driver's seat while Peter got in the other, both getting used to the stifling aura brought on by the small space.

As FRIDAY steered them away and out of the neighborhood, he was hit with a strong sense of nostalgia. And then promptly rolled his eyes at himself.

God, he hoped he wouldn't regret this.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will be out some time next month, since somehow I made a pattern of updating once every month lmao. So stay tuned!

(As like a reference for what's gonna happen, look at the summary of the fic. That Scene™ is finally happening!)

Can't Keep Living For The Damage

Chapter Summary

“With every single night I'd have to face
With every single dream I'd have to chase
I wonder if our love's in the same place”

“I will try and be the man that I said I would
Just come back home,
I'm burning like a fire, will someone help my pain?
I'm drowning above the water, oh, help me breathe again. Oh ah and I, I can't let you
go, so when you're ready, come back home”

Chapter Notes

IMPORTANT, PLEASE READ BEFORE CONTINUING

1. For my old readers (and news for my new readers) you may have noticed that I've added an extra chapter to the chapter count. Why, you may ask? Because at 2AM one faithful night I had the most brilliant idea for a twisted ending and I couldn't decide on going with the original ending or following that one. So, I decided that I may as well make both! The last one will be a more dark version, and may even lead to a sequel if the reviews are positive. So, yeah, look out for that.

2. OH MY GOSH SOMEONE MADE A POEM FOR PETER'S GALAXY (in direct reference to the chapter where Tony talks to Stan about everyone being their own galaxies) AND IT'S ABSOLUTELY AMAZING. Please, either before or after this chapter, read it!

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/19084435>

It's so very good and i'm so humbled to receive something of this gravity, like it still brings me immense joy to think about. You guys are amazing.

3. Last thing, I promise. There have been a few comments asking me if Matt is going to be returning. The answer is yes! Not only will he be in this particular story, but me and my wonderful beta decided to co-write a few stories with DareDad as the main dynamic. It won't necessarily all be this Peter and Matt, but it'll definitely be the duo. (That being said, if you guys have any ideas of what you want to see/have, leave a comment! That's always exciting c:)

Without further ado, welcome to chapter 10.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Was.

A simple word. Three letters. A part of the English dictionary, used unconsciously almost every day by every human who speaks or thinks. A simple word that's used to talk about the past and present.

Peter was in the car with Tony.

Tony was trying to breathe normally, despite his heart rate being anything but.

It felt like there was an invisible barrier around them, choking any words that wanted to form.

Was, is a powerful word. An underestimated one.

It had the power to change the meaning of a sentence, abandon any pretenses and build its own; It was stronger than a simple 'were', powerful as all forms of the word 'to'. Underestimated such as the capitalization of the word 'I' and forever more than the word 'the'.

Was had the ability to do so much *more* .

Like begin its own scene, or end a strong statement.

Was.

Was Peter doing the right thing? Taking the time out of his day to listen to whatever Tony had to say? Allowing himself to be so vulnerable that he lets another man lead him to an unknown destination?

He wished he had all the answers.

But as it was, he didn't and he didn't think he would.

Fighting off the horrid stench of trepidity, Peter finally found his voice. "So, uh, where have you...

Been? Like, what have you been doing?"

Oh dear God.

He wanted to face palm, throw himself out of the car, and stagger into the sluggish traffic that they were stuck in; in no specific order. Where had his sudden regression of language come from? It felt like it did any other time Peter had talked to Tony. Stumbled words, classic teenager fillers thrown in every once and awhile. If Tony noticed the change from the strong talk on the street to the sudden bumbling babble, he didn't comment.

Instead, he blinked and turned towards Peter, fidgeting around his seatbelt. Ever since they got in the car about seven minutes ago, he had yet to actually look Peter in the eyes. Something told the teenager that it wouldn't happen for a while.

The air in the car became stifling once more, feeling like centuries of silence. In reality, however, it was only a few seconds. "I've been working on new Stark tech. Board meetings. Been meeting up with an older fellow, seems really smart and down to Earth; you may enjoy his presence if you guys ever happen to cross paths." He cleared his throat. "Y'know, opposites attract and all. Older and younger, you guys may be able to spew a few world ending philosophical phrases. He likes to do that kind of stuff."

Peter knew Tony was pulling at straws to make a joke. Back then, before the absence, Tony knew exactly what to say for any conversation. If he wanted Peter to laugh, he would make a joke regarding his physical being. To feel better, he would pull a random story about Cap. To fill a normal silence, he would make a self degrading joke.

But this wasn't a normal silence. It was drowning and suffocating at the same time, demanding its presence to be known and deflecting any form of conversation that may kill it. This type of silence never fell between them before. There was no predicting what to say, how to act.

It was all so raw and exposed.

Peter wasn't surprised that Tony had no idea what to say, because in all honesty he didn't know either.

Nonetheless, he tried to keep it going. "You know, that's not actually true." He told Tony, looking out the passenger window. "'Opposites attract.' That's just, y'know, a saying to make people feel

better. In all reality, it's actually proximity breeds familiarity. More you're with someone, the more you like 'em."

Tony blinked.

Peter scrunched his eyebrows while he waited for an answer. Once a sizable space of silence spread between them, he started to turn and question Tony, but then it hit him what he had insinuated.

Proximity breeds familiarity.

They had been separated for the better half of a year. Despite being near inseparable before, as both Tony and Peter and Iron Man and Spiderman, they still had that gap. That large time period that stretched their bond thin, nearly severing it completely. They didn't know who each other were anymore. Not like before. Now they were just faces with names that had the ghost of memories singing wistfully in their veins.

Proximity breeds familiarity.

Tony clears his throat. Moves on.

"You take a psychology class in that genius school of yours?" He asked, taking in Peter's form. Despite being hidden under baggy clothing, he could still see how much he'd grown. He looked more like a man, finally fitting into his shoulders. The underlying power that coursed through his body could be seen from miles away with how he held himself. Like he was unstoppable; a gem forged through fire.

And yet... He looked skinny.

Not malnourished, not at all. He had meat on his bones and filled out his sharp edges to make them slightly softer, but there was still something up. Something wrong. He wasn't as big (is that the right word to use, or is that rude?) as before. And granted, he used to be a grade A stick. But now?

Now he lost weight, and Tony didn't know how to bring it up.

Maybe it had something to do with his financial situation. If May and him had moved apartments and were struggling to make ends meet to the extent of skipping a few meals, Tony wouldn't be able to forgive himself for not doing something.

He'd have to ask about May at some point.

Peter hadn't noticed the inquisitive gaze he was under, because all he did was shrug. "For about a week, give or take a few days." And then he smiled. A small one, that Tony probably wouldn't have noticed unless he saw the movement himself. As if he was laughing at an inside joke, one that he didn't think Tony would know or handle.

Huh. That... Was new.

Back before, Peter would be eager to share any joke with him. In fact, at times it seemed like he longed to have his own personal joke with the billionaire. The teen would ramble his way through their visits, always shocking Tony with how little he needed to breathe. And now? Now Peter is smiling at something he doesn't get, and he's almost positive that he won't ever hear the backstory.

Oddly, that hurt.

Silence ensued between them once more, ambient noises filling the space where conversation should be. The honking of horns around them, the yapping of a dog on a leash that passed the street. All around them, chatter from New Yorkers.

God, this was insufferable.

"So," Tony started once more, in an effort to ward off the awkwardness. "How have you been?" Peter crossed his arms over his chest and brought his legs up in the seat, sitting criss crossed despite his seat belt. It made him look smaller, but less ready to jump out of the vehicle at any given moment. "I've just.. Y'know. Been." When he looked at Tony, he knew he had to elaborate. "Had some really bad moments, and now I'm having some really good moments. Got a job, in fact. I like it there, even made a name for myself."

That. That was news to Tony.

Seriously, how much had he missed? It felt like a slap in the face to hear about Peter's accomplishment of landing a job, because he always assumed his next position would be at Stark Industries, working as Tony's protégé.

Sure, he had the freelance job as a photographer, taking pictures of Spiderman just to be slandered by The Bugle. But they had both mutually agreed that that wasn't much of a job, rather a way for quick money when it was needed.

(Peter, quite literally, screeched and shot a web at Tony's face when he offered to just give Peter a small gift of ten thousand dollars. The newspapers had a riot for the next month about speculations as to what caused Spiderman to shoot Iron Man point blank.)

So to hear that Peter managed to find somewhere to hire him? A part of Tony grew with pride, but another withered away with shame. How much had his kid-- *the* kid changed?

"That's great news!" Tony told him, coughing to hide his shock. "You know, the job part. Not the bad moments."

Peter shrugged, as if he didn't agree. "It had to happen eventually. I just so happened to be in the right place at the right time." He looked back out the window, sighing. "Tony, why are you doing this?"

The air left Tony's chest at the question. It definitely wasn't like Peter to cut straight to the chase, without any pampering to soften the blow of his words. Or rather, it wasn't like him when he was just Peter Parker; not Spiderman. But Tony knew how to roll with the punches, and took the question in good grace. "What do you mean, kid? I've already told you. I'm--"

"Yeah yeah, you're mending your mistakes."

The absolute bored tone in Peter's voice seemed to come more as a shock than anything. Never, *ever* has he used that tone. So much has changed with the teenager, and with each word he spoke, it sent Tony into a tiny spiral.

Peter turned once more, looking at Tony. Actually looking at him, piercing into his eyes and reading everything. "You know, it sucks. Losing your dad. You know how that feels, of course you do." He rolled his eyes at himself, before steeling his expression again. "I've lost my father and my uncle, two of the greatest men who I had the privilege of being related to. And you know what?"

Tony wanted to know where this was going. He knew he would hate it, but he wanted to know. Because Peter was looking at him with so much intensity, so much emotion. The same look that he had seen in full grown men who were haunted by their past. A look that no one should have, yet many were forced to carry.

“I lost you, too. You know how much that sucked? Do you, Tony? I couldn’t even lay and try to sleep with the knowledge that I did everything I could and you were gone for some reason out of my control. No, you aren’t dead like my father. You weren’t killed like my uncle. You *left*. You left me because you were scared of the future, so you closed your eyes. Wished it all away. Wished *me* away.”

Peter uncrossed his arms so that he could jab a finger at Tony accusingly. “Closing your eyes isn’t going to change anything. Nothing’s going to disappear just because you can’t see what’s going on... So here I am, telling you to keep your eyes wide open. Because only a coward closes his eyes, and I would hate for that to be a defining term for you, despite everything.”

He looked away, the fight draining out of his body just as quick as it came.

Tony felt as if he had been turned into a shish kebab.

Peter had let everything out. Or not everything, but a good chunk of turmoil that plagued him. And of course, it was directed towards Tony. Duh, he expected it. But it doesn’t mean that it hurt any less.

Because everything he said, ultimately, was true. It was Tony’s choice to leave. It was his choice to seek out a teenager who lost both people who filled the fatherly role in his life, and to be the one to initiate all of their meet ups. Get close enough to tip toe the lines of a father-son relationship, before leaping away.

He wasn’t killed. He still had blood in his veins, blood that coursed through his body and allowed his legs to get him to stand, and to walk. Walk away both physically and metaphorically. And why? Why had he done it?

That question seemed to loom over his head, and had no signs of an easy answer.

Yet while that question couldn’t be answered, he was still presented with the few rhetorical

questions that he, for some reason, felt obligated to answer to.

“Pete, I’m..” He thought back to what the teen said about apologizing, instead settling on licking his lips. “I... Was scared. To put myself out there, be that vulnerable. Howard, God, even saying his name when I’m being a baby with my emotions is like a silent mockery.” He scoffed at his absurdity, reminding himself that this was a serious moment that shouldn’t be joked about. “He wasn’t exactly the poster parent the media made him out to be. You know this.”

Peter squinted his eyes, crossing his arms protectively over his chest once more. Allowing Tony to speak, despite knowing that he won’t enjoy whatever comes out of his mouth. “And I just... I saw the way that you lit up at my praise, saw how close you were getting to me. And I panicked, I guess. I didn’t want to taint you, not like my last name promises to do.”

“Pete, every time that I saw you hurt, I wanted to kill whoever or whatever did that to you. The insane instinct to just protect you was overwhelming. So much so, that I realized I was head over heels with the aspect of a child. But Pepper wasn’t so on board, and one thing led to another and she left, then Rhodey went on a mission and I haven’t talked to him in over a year, and just... It seemed right that you would leave next, I guess.”

By then, Tony was looking somewhere far away, out of the passenger window. Not at the people who passed by, not at the buildings. Somewhere where he could only focus on. Peter was doing the same, but rather focusing on Tony’s face. His expression, the way his chin moves when he talks. The look in his eyes, the subtle lines that look more pronounced with each passing moment.

“I figured doing the work myself this time would make things better. Clearly, I was wrong.”

Silence ensued once more.

A deep feeling washed over the duo, brought on by the strong implications. Something dark, suffocating. Unlike the silence before, this time somehow appearing more toxic. It wasn’t one that told the two that they couldn’t speak; no, it encouraged it. The only thing stopping anything from happening was the war between themselves.

Peter wasn’t satisfied.

Rationally, he knew that it was rude. He knew where Tony was coming from, and a large part of him sympathized with him. His best friend vanished one day and the love of his life left after he got

excited about sharing their lives with a little human, one whole person made of two halves supplemented by them.

But, just as Tony said, it was his choice to push Peter away.

Peter didn't get that choice. He was forced into it, forced to roll with the punches. Left staggering, stumbling, and eventually falling to his bruised and battered knees. And he was forced to grow from that choice, bending and contorting to heal in the wrong ways.

He wanted to scream. He wanted to yell. Hell, even a part of him just wanted to curl up and say that he's sorry.

But in actuality, all he did was open his mouth. Force words to come out of his mouth, despite tasting like ash. Because despite his reluctance to forgive the billionaire, there was still too many parts of him that were scarred and were being forced open.

He needed to get everything out.

"Did you stop at *any* point to think of me?" He asked, dragging his eyes to follow Tony's brown ones. The ones that used to hold so much light, so much happiness with every expression, despite the residual fear in the undertones. "And not just what I was doing. How I was doing? How you leaving was going to affect me? Because I'll tell you now, after May it wasn't pretty. I wanted-- needed-- someone in my corner. It was all harsh and horrible and there were times I didn't think I would get through."

"But you know what? I did. And I did it by myself, up until the end where I had help. Help that was offered to me, that took the role of my friends and even one that somehow managed to weasel his way into the one that you left so uncomfortably open."

He knew that his words were confusing Tony. He could see it written all over his face. But he still didn't stop, for some ungodly reason. "And you know what? Tony, that *hurt*. I trusted you. And you pushed me away right as I needed it the most." He huffed out a breath of air, finally lowering his eyes. He couldn't get himself to make eye contact anymore. "A part of me wants to forgive you. Really, *really* wants to. But I can't. Not now. Even with your apologies, there's still a part missing. A part I need to find, I guess."

He allowed Tony a few moments to process his word dump. Because in truth, he knew it was a lot. Filled with rhetorical questions and connotations that were a little too close to personal territory than he cared to hit. But he opened the can of worms, so he knew that if Tony called him out on it then he would have to deal with it.

And Tony, in those few moments? Something hit him. Something he had known, but hadn't really payed attention to. Because it was common logic, really. But when it was apparent, when it was shoved in his face? He couldn't ignore it.

It occurred to him that Peter was real. He wasn't a concept nor a symbol nor a metaphor. He actually existed. In this time, in this place. In this world, universe, however far you want to stretch it. He had warm flesh and a spirit that moved as gentle as a midsummers breeze. And at some point, he lost sight of that warmth and that movement.

A simple thing that he's always known. But not something he ever dwelled about.

Because its never really mattered. Of course Peter was real, despite probably being half human because of The Bite. But he's real, and he is just as susceptible as everyone else to life's daily pains and struggles. As ready as anyone else to be faced with trauma.

(In the back of his mind, he knew that the man had already been through a shit ton of trauma. Like, *you-should-probably-look-for-therapy* trauma. He really should've known that all of the happy-go-lucky smiles couldn't have been real.)

And his absence had left a crater filled hole, edges like daggers that impaled anyone who tried entering his spot.

Apparently, that didn't deter this new man to hop in. Tony couldn't even find it in himself to be jealous, he was the one who left after all. But yet, a part of him still felt sad. He knew it was wrong for him to even think about settling back in and starting over again, yet he couldn't bring himself to stop. Peter was the closest thing to a child that he could have, and yet he managed to screw even that up.

God, and for this new guy to have May's approval? He had to endure *so* many date loaves for that. Tony's stomach felt bad for the other guy, while his mind applauded his endurance.

Yet... Peter mentioned May being gone. Or saying 'after May,' but the genius was fluent in

reading between the lines. Last time Tony checked, albeit *months* upon months ago, May and Pete still had a well and functioning relationship. She wouldn't just kick him out, would she?

But Tony knew that he had enough time to think. Or rather, took up enough time so that it now trickled into being an uncomfortable silence instead of a heavy one. So he shook his head, coughed a bit to clear his throat, and asked "is there anything I could do, or not do, to help you? Which-- sue me because I know-- is incredibly late. But... I miss you, Pete. I miss our times together, I miss having you swing off of my armor for a free ride."

Peter went back to looking out the window, wondering how many times he'd done the same motion before. "Let's, like, just talk. No more heavy topics, not for at least another five minutes." He sighed, then asked in a quieter voice, "please."

Of course Tony couldn't deny the boy that one small reprieve.

"Yeah," he said. "Yeah, of course. So... Who's this devil that you're living with?" This caused a smile to spread over Peter's face, the biggest one Tony has seen yet. "Contrary to his name, he's actually a really cool dude. Like, *super* cool. He got beat up a while ago after helping a bunch of people, so we had his nurse friend over to tend to his wounds. Now he's all dopey and stuff because of the insane amount of pain medication he's on." He snickered. "I'm not even sure he knew that I left. He's been out of it for a while now."

Tony, despite his mood, felt himself smiling too. "Sounds like he's incredibly noble. He have a name?"

Peter froze, before lowering his eyes to look at the tires of the vehicle next to them. "Yeah. But not one I'm willing to share yet."

The teen didn't know why there was a sudden need to protect Matt's identity. It wasn't likely that Tony would connect the first name to locally known Matthew Murdock, and then manage to connect Daredevil's recent victory against Wilson Fisk and saving all of Hell's Kitchen to the small nickname that Tony currently knew him as. Yet Peter has underestimated Tony before.

(Somewhere, deep in the recesses of his mind, he was shouting because he didn't want to give Tony that invitation to pry on his personal life. Not that much.)

(Of course, that was ludicrous and Peter told that voice to shut up. But the thought was still there,

no matter how hard he willed it away.)

Sensing the still in Peter's words, Tony pushed on. Ignored the blatant fact that, yet again, there was something that Peter was keeping from him. He wasn't used to the omitted information, but something in him told him that if they were to ever be friends again, he would have to get used to it.

(It hit Tony that he was practically begging for a teenager to be his friend again, and he wondered what that said about his character overall. Probably nothing good.)

"What, is this like a level based hierarchy?" He joked, putting his hands on the wheel in front of him more as a nervous habit than to actually steer. He had FRIDAY doing that, anyways. "One through ten, and a name would be somewhere above level three?"

Peter shrugged. "If you want to think about it that way, I guess. You'd be on level two."

Wow.

Ouch.

Tony didn't let the jab deter him. Instead, he tried to do everything in his power to ward away the silence that was trying to weasel its way into the car once more. "Yikes. Well bud, on my list, you'd be about a four or four point five. Just in case you were wondering." Peter cracked a small smile at that, body language relaxing ever so slightly.

Tony counted that as progress.

Peter counted it as slowly building trust.

"Boss," FRIDAY cut in for the first time this afternoon, "it appears all roads are being held up by a multitude of accidents caused by failed brakes. Would you like me to send two suits for you and Mr. Parker?"

Peter squinted, mind flashing to the other day when he saved Ned, Flash, and Michelle.

Coincidence, maybe. But Peter didn't believe in coincidences, and something pricked at the back of his mind telling him to keep an eye out.

However, being oblivious to the near accident the other day, Tony just responded casually to the AI. "No, girl, don't worry about it. We'll just ride this one out." He paused, glancing at Peter, before adding "I'll update you if that changes."

"Very well, sir."

Tony rolled his eyes after taking a glance at his phone, map pulled up on the screen courtesy of FRIDAY. "Well, kid, looks like you're stuck with me. Lest you jump out in the middle of the street with no sense as to where you are."

Somehow, Peter found himself relaxing even more in the seat. With the soft spoken words, he found that that was exactly what he *didn't* want to do. Spending time with Tony was... Well, it was something. And something was more than the nothing that he was used to.

So even with the stifling trauma that continued to try to rear its ugly head, Peter found that he was okay staying. Okay with being stuck in the advanced vehicle with Tony, despite being offered a way out.

He found himself unbuckling his seatbelt just to settle in the car a little more. No use in it when they were barely moving, was it?

Tony quirked an eyebrow at his choices, but didn't comment any further.

In fact, he found himself following suit. He knew that FRIDAY would keep them protected from harm, and he knew that Peter, with all of his brute strength that could be used to snap a guys' neck in half with a simple touch, was nothing of danger. At least, physically.

Mentally, however.

He knew that there were going to be things said. Things from both his side and Peter's. Things that may not even happen in the car ride, but rather throughout the next couple of weeks if they continue talking. It'll hurt like a bitch, but intrinsically Tony knew he deserved it.

He deserved it all, and so much more.

But instead of boarding that God awful train, he averted his attention to his twiddling fingers. Peter watched his movements, analyzing him. Comparing him to the man he knew, both public Tony Stark and Private Tony Stark.

See, in public, Tony was loud and rambunctious and cocky. He always had a quip, especially in the Iron Man suit. He smiled in the face of danger, and spit at the insubordination of corrupt political machines. He was brilliant in more ways than one, and wasn't afraid to show what he could do.

But in private? Tony was a complete stranger from that man. He was quiet, thoughtful. Paid attention to details more, allowed his muscles to relax. Thought too much and slept too little. He showed his love to his robots by giving them dunce hats and pretending to drink their motor oil filled smoothies. He was kind and polite, finding comfort in the panic.

But this? This Tony Stark?

The one next to him in the driver's seat is completely different. A blend of the two characters, a man forged through misery. He was broken and beaten, and still had time to joke. Showed his twisted love and tried to change it. He explained problems and tried to fix them, even when he knew that there wasn't anything that could be done anymore. His snark was still there, but dialed down to the lowest setting.

This.

This was Tony Stark.

As much as Peter tried to challenge himself into thinking, he knew he couldn't change his mind. This was Tony, the man who helped him when he was injured. Laughed at him when he did something stupid, and laughed with him when he was on the receiving side. Held him in a hug and whispered sweet nothings when Peter couldn't save the lady fast enough, and made him hot chocolate when he couldn't sleep.

The man who left him because he was hurt and thought it was the right course of action.

Peter looked away.

He convinced himself that everything would be fine. He could do this. He needed to do this. Because deep in the recesses of his mind, he still wanted a relationship with the engineer. So he sucked up any residual feelings he may have had prior.

“So, how’s May? Went by your old place and saw you moved out. What’s up with that?”

And yeah.

That notion was tossed right out the window.

The mention of his dead relative really had a way of souring his finally turning positive mood. Truly. Peter’s body language instantly changed. Instead of relaxed in his seat without a single care in the world, he morphed into stiff shoulders and rigid posture. As if his Spidey sense was going off because a gun cracked next to his sensitive ears.

Tony meant no harm. Peter knew that. But at the same time, he found himself on the defensive. Even more than Matt’s name. Because Tony was someone who knew May. On a personal level. Not just as Peter’s ‘hot aunt’ or even just a nurse at the hospital she worked at. No, he knew her as a friend.

A friend who has been dead for longer than it felt.

Tony must have noticed the switch in demeanor, judging by the furrow of his brows. He tried parting his lips to get words to come out, but found that he had none. Because he had absolutely *no* idea what he said that could’ve caused that violent of a reaction. “Uh, Pete? Was it something I said?”

The teenager couldn’t keep the venom from rolling off of him in waves, not caring if he poisoned the man next to him.

How dare he.

How *dare* he.

How.

Dare.

He.

This rage. The absolute coldness of the temperature in the car. The scowl, the low animalistic growl, the predatory look. Everything about Peter screamed *dangerous*, a complete antithesis to the person he was a few moments ago.

“*Don’t you dare,*” he ground out, Meeting Tony’s slightly scared look, “*mention her name.*”

Tony, for the life of him, could not figure what the fuck was going on. He had never in his life seen the teenager get this hostile, let alone at him. All he did was mention May, and--

Something clicked.

Something deep in the recesses of his lizard brain clicked. His one point five brain cells threw themselves down and bounced up again like the old school pinball machines.

The anger. The malice. The avoidance. The move. The absolute radio silence from her.

Peter and May had to have had a falling out.

“Oh, Pete,” he said with as much of gentleness as he could. “I’m so sorry, I didn’t know.”

Peter reached for the door handle. Found it locked. Scowled, and this huffed out an angry breath. “I’m not opposed to breaking this, you know.”

And wow, ouch. Tony's door to his prized Audi.

He couldn't help but feel a little anger, himself.

Because what in the absolute hell was happening? He had been kind and benevolent and yet Peter was threatening to destroy his property. The property they worked on together. The finest and most top of the line car out there.

"Uh, yeah. Nice try, kid. Open the door like a real fucking person."

Peter turned slowly towards Tony, fingers never letting go of the handle. His gaze was dark and distant, and Tony suddenly had the picturing of the galaxy Stan talked about.

A complete contrast to what he imagined to be months ago.

What he imagined was that Peter had a galaxy full of stars. Absolutely lighting up the black abyss, combining colors to make a combination of different hues of the colors blue, pink, red, purple, and everything in between.

Moons would circle planets, jumping and twisting like they were in a game of hop scotch. On said planets, life would flourish. There would be the brightest green forests, the most clear blue water that Tony could imagine.

Content, would be the main feeling of everything. Comets would float around like they owned the entire cosmic area, tails wooshing like those dogs Peter always got so excited about.

Of course, there would be black holes. Representing grief, loss, negativity. All the bad emotions and actions that plagued the teenager, kept him up at night and got him screaming throughout the day. No human was perfect, of course. But Peter was pretty damn close, or what Tony thought.

But now?

Now staring into those almond colored eyes, Tony couldn't picture that galaxy anymore.

What he saw now, was an endless abyss of darkness. Black, slick like ink and cold as obsidian. Where he envisioned the multitude of planets before, there were now only the swirling masses that threatened to shoot and suck all the stars away.

And by the looks of it, it had.

The stars were in a small corner of his galaxy. Conglomerated into a little nebula, bright colors muted into a creud version of his red and blues. Now, they looked more like black and dark amber.

Comets didn't fly around anymore, too scared of getting lost.

The planets were few and far in between. Life, was obsolete. The worlds were taken over, oceans gone and plant life torn down by fire and overpopulation, dying or already dead. They painted the land, or what was left of the land, brown.

His universe was glowing and dimming at the same time. And it seemed like in a split second, Tony decided that if he were to get expelled from this universe, he would go out like the stars in his chest. Silently and impactfully.

He swallowed the residual spit in his mouth that accumulated due to his sudden adrenaline rush caused by the seething gaze. Tried to keep his voice level as he told Peter "No matter how far you run, distance won't solve everything."

His arc reactor turned on with his racing adrenaline, blue light attracting Peter's eyes. Suddenly, he regretted the newest development.

Peter squinted, some of the anger fading away to give room to curiosity. His head tilted ever so slightly to the side, cocked to the right. Then, he jutted his chin out in the direction of the glowing light on his chest. "Why?" was all he asked. Traces of that fire was still buried in the simple word, working to lower the temperature even more.

Scary.

Tony swallowed, trying to get himself to calm down. “New idea. Turns on when my pulse reaches a certain point, and then releases a completely functional nanotech suit once it climbs even higher.”

God, he hoped that he didn’t go full on Iron Man in the car.

He wasn’t sure if his seats could take it.

Peter seemed to have backed off slightly at the realization that he was edging on releasing a death machine in such a closed space. He reeled his dampened galaxy in a bit, no longer projecting on all four sides. Instead, it stayed like an aura; encompassing his movements but never extending any farther.

Tony wanted to blow a sigh of relief, but felt that he couldn’t.

Even if the teenager had calmed down slightly, Tony hadn’t. He still felt confused and lost and angry. Something about being attacked in his personal space by someone who he never thought of a threat didn’t rub him the right way.

Luckily, they didn’t ghost over the issue at hand. The big elephant in the room-- or more accurately, car. Peter looked back at Tony, making eye contact again.

Tony had *so* many questions.

But only one seemed to come out.

“What the fuck?”

Which, luckily, opened up a gateway for more. He shook his head side to side quickly, blubbering like a walrus. “You-- I-- what? Care to share with the class what just happened?”

Sometimes, Tony has to chant to himself that he’s a genius. Especially in moments like this, where he turns about as articulate as a fourteen year old being greeted by a female for the first time.

Peter rolled his eyes in aggravation, hand still on the door. Gripping. Ready to leave at short notice, regardless if the door is locked or not. At least he had the gall to apologize. “I overreacted, I can admit that.” Tony found himself rolling his eyes this time, not being able to stop the snarky response. “Yeah, you sure did kiddo. Now, what in the hell got you wanting to reenact that stupid blue hedgehog?” He paused, before adding “was it her?”

The teen stiffened, which was a genuine surprise for Tony. With how tense he was, he thought that Peter wouldn’t be able to move any more. A dark look clouded Peter’s eyes, gaze turning stormy as he looked out the window. Once more, away from Tony. “Yeah, it was *her*. And I would appreciate it if you at least had the decency to act like you know more than you do.”

Ouch.

Instead of making it sting and make him feel like he deserved it, however, Tony just felt even more rage at the jab. His face must have reflected it, too, because Peter acknowledged the personal shift.

But also, the jab gave Tony a little more to go off of. Judging from the present tense, May was still a part of Peter’s life, or affected him greatly. So much that he didn’t want Tony to even say her name. Maybe instead of a big fight that left them in two different households, they were just on bad terms with each other. One of those ‘I love you, but I loathe your actions’ type of situations.

Tony thought he still had May’s number. He may put that to good use later on.

But that was later on, and that wasn’t affecting him now. What was affecting him now, was the seething teenager next to him that triggered his own residual feelings of anger. In the back of his mind, he wondered how they could’ve derailed this quickly. Logically, he could pinpoint exactly when and how they shifted, but he wasn’t thinking logically.

Rather, Tony was acting emotionally. Letting his heart lead him on. And right now? Right now his heart was telling him that he deserved to be a little stingy. He shouldn’t have to take this anger, not to keel over and show his belly to someone who happened to raise their voice slightly.

No, he was a Stark. Stark’s were Made of Iron. They weren’t supposed to be anything other than brash, forged through tyranny with defeat being a foreign concept.

Tony wouldn’t lose this battle.

But winning the battle meant fighting back, which is what made him pause in the slightest.

Something about this felt... Wrong.

Like something was missing. A huge part of the puzzle, one that was staring him in the face. But he couldn't quite reach far enough past it to understand. All he knew was what he was inferencing, so that was all he could go off of.

"God, Peter, how am I supposed to know what I don't know?" He snapped, feeling his breaking point. "You need to talk to me, damn it!" His hand rushed through his hair, getting it to stick up in each direction.

Peter looked at him like he was crazy. "And why would I do *that*, huh?" His voice was laced with venom and hardened through stone, penetrating Tony and causing his arc reactor to glow ever more slightly with his thrumming pulse. "Because how else am I supposed to know how to help you!" Tony almost roared. "I don't know how you are or what you're doing because you won't tell me anything, and then you get mad because I'm working on little to no information? Kid, do you realize how stupid that is?!"

The air in the car turned solid, blocking all outside noises. All that was left being deadly gasses that slowly killed them from the inside out. Taking a big gulp of his preferred poison, Tony said in a much lower and calmer voice "I want to help you, Pete. But I need to know what's going on."

Cautious was the wrong move, apparently. "Why are you making such a big deal over this?!" Peter all but growls, suddenly wishing he ignored his initial thought to walk to Midtown. He should've just stayed home and taken care of Matt. God, thinking of the man made Peter want to jump out of the car and run to hug him.

He was quickly regretting his decision to be stuck in such a small space with Tony.

"Because kid, I made a promise! So it would be in your best interest to talk to me, and listen to what I have to say." Peter couldn't help but pause at those words. A promise? In less than a second, he remembered all the promises he's ever made with anyone (because ever the realist, he's only made a few) and came up with nothing with Tony. Maybe a personal promise, then. Either way, since it wasn't known to him, Peter chose to ignore it.

"You mean in your best interest," he retorted, feeling less than his age. What a middle schooler

thing to say. He almost wanted to roll his eyes at the pitiful retort, but at last second stopped himself.

His spidey sense lit up his back like a fire cracker, yelling at him to grab something. Reacting quickly, his hands shot out to hold the 'oh shit' bar and the side of the console. Just as he did this, Tony took control of the vehicle from FRIDAY to slam on the breaks, momentarily startling Peter.

Finally, the sound of cars honking behind them reached Peter's ears, and he wondered if he just blocked them out because he had other things to focus on. Their complaints go unnoticed to Tony however, as he swerves to the side of the road, placing the car in park before turning menacingly and shouting "What has gotten into you, Peter?"

Just thinking about how they started this entire conversation made Tony's head spin. It was like it happened an entire lifetime ago. From the quiet words and shy questions, to the overlying malevolence and shouting match happening between them.

As a surprise to both of them, when Peter asked "what do you care?" they both were hit with unbridled anger simmering, on the verge of exploding.

Tony, feeling challenged, decided to bring up the only other adult he could think of that could possibly knock some sense into the teenager next to him. "I care a lot. Now 'fess up kiddo, or do I have to call May?"

Almost like the black holes in Stan's metaphor, the air was sucked out of the car. All anger, dispersing. The car got quiet, the low rumble of the still running vehicle mixing with the labored breaths of its occupants. Tony continued to glare at Peter, almost slamming his hand as hard as he could onto the wheel when he saw Peter reaching for the door handle once more.

When Peter spoke again, all traces of anger were gone. Instead, he just sounded defeated. Resigned. Like the dragon that fueled his breaths had gone to sleep, and left the boy drained and lost without its mentor to guide him.

His next words were as cold as ice, shooting through Tony's core.

"Go right ahead, won't help anyways. Calling a dead person won't magically get them to answer."

...

Silence.

Absolute, silence.

...

Peter squeezed the door handle, and found that it was still locked.

He sighed, wondering why he expected anything to change with his admission.

Because for him, nothing changed. He just said out loud a fact that he'd known for months. One that was still heavy and impactful, but just not for him.

Everything seemed to end in silence. The beasts of untold stories and spirits of heavy words heaved a deep breath, broke up their encirclement, and returned to the depths of their beings, where they had lost their hearts.

Tony... Tony was shocked. More than shocked. He felt as if he was slapped in the face by The Hulk, and then butchered by Natasha.

That.

That was the missing puzzle piece. The thing that brought everything together, the very thing that Tony couldn't see.

The empty apartment. The skinny stature. The absolute silence in the courtyard at Midtown when he uttered a ghost's name. Graduating early. The warehouse being the main place of activity. (God, *the warehouse being the main place of activity*).

May had died.

May died, and Peter ran away.

Peter went through that all by himself. He carried the knowledge that he was the last of the Parker bloodline. Shouldered it all and still managed to come out okay.

If okay meant getting out of the vehicle after dropping the bombshell of a truth.

Tony seemed to snap out of his reverie quick enough to realize that he was leaving. And in the back of his mind, he remembered that he told Peter that he could.

So he wasn't really thinking, when he acted next.

...Peter needed to get out.

Get out of there, like, yesterday. Everything seemed to want to suffocate him, beckoning him to stay in the icy clutches of despair.

He felt himself panicking, knew that it would lead to a panic attack if he didn't change anything. And even if Tony had experience with panic attacks (especially when Peter would have them), it didn't necessarily mean that Peter was comfortable with the level of trust that entailed.

So he unlocked the car while Tony reeled back from the bomb, unknowingly handing the reins of the conversation to him. And in his personal opinion, the conversation needed to be over.

He climbed out of the car, sticking his left foot out and then the right. The air already felt better, clearing his head. Quickly he was able to map out a game plan on what to do now, which mainly consisted of getting home to Matt and never seeing the billionaire anywhere except on television again.

He went to take another step, and felt something grab the back of his shirt collar.

And okay, you know, normally he would've sensed it. But in his defense, his mind was scattered

everywhere and he was still trying to sweep them all up in one pile.

Luckily, all thoughts stopped as he was jerked back.

Naturally, something told him that he could've just snapped whatever was holding him like a twig. But once more, he told himself that he didn't because he was distracted.

Whatever had him whipped him around faster than he could blink. And suddenly, he was being crushed.

... What hit him first was the smell.

Coffee, oil, and a small dash of cologne. The same scent that used to comfort Peter after a hard day, the one he used to confide in. The smells that still lingered in a certain MIT jacket.

... Next, was the weight.

He felt two strong arms around him. Grounding him. Keeping him in place. Arms that have held him before as he tried not to cry his eyes out. Arms that led to rough and calloused hands, which have fluttered anxiously over his past beaten body. Noticed that his chin was resting on something warm, soft.

And then, the next thing he knew, he could hear.

Hear the racing pulse, feel it thrum through skin. Unsteady breaths. Unsure, or something else? Either way, he felt the way it reverberated through his too warm skin, slowing the shaking in his hands that he failed to notice before.

Finally, he saw.

Saw the car in front of him, both the passenger and drivers doors wide open. Saw the gauntlet that latched onto his shirt collar fly in his peripheral, only to melt away like water into the warm arc reactor that was currently resting lightly on his chest. Only moving his eyes, he saw that it was Tony who was hugging him. Tony, of course. His eyes were closed and his face was filled with

despair, from what Peter could tell.

Belatedly, he realized that he wasn't ebbing towards a panic attack anymore. No, now he just felt drained. Like someone unplugged his battery and he was on his last limbs. His limbs felt heavy and his head was still clouded, but one thing made sense to him.

Even with the shouting match, where Peter acted out of line. After The Truth came out. After the guilt, the blame, the absolute anger.

Tony was still here. And Tony was hugging him.

Slowly, as if chains were attempting to hold him back, Peter brought his arms to wrap under Tony's. Allowed himself to sink more into the embrace, stuffing his nose into the crook of Tony's neck, inhaling the scents that made the man who he is. Felt his shoulders slacken just barely, but enough for the man's arms around his neck to tighten just a fraction.

No matter what happened.

No matter what was going to happen.

Peter could safely say that in that moment, he was okay.

Okay with everything, because when April ended and May came along and May was even worse than April, Peter was able to grow. Grow more, even without the presence of anyone. And when May bled into June and Peter had no choice but to recognize the trembling of his heart when the sun had set and he was alone, he knew that there would be a moment like this. A moment of serenity, the calm after the storm.

In the pale evening gloom, when the smell of the old ratty warehouse would float through Peter's nostrils and invade his sensitive senses, his heart would swell with agony without warning. It would tremble and lurch with a stab of pain brought on by the absence of his family. He remembered trying to clamp his eyes shut and gritting his teeth to wait for the pain to pass.

And eventually, it did. But it did slowly, taking its own time. It left a dull ache behind.

But now? Now Peter couldn't feel that dull ache. Felt lighter in the arms of his old mentor, with the knowledge that his new family was still-- probably, Matt and recovery were always a wild card-- laying on the couch in his house. His *home*.

Peter didn't understand what happened in those moments, but he sure as hell wasn't one to complain.

Because with every inhale, he was reminded of how far he had come. Just how far he would go.

And now, for some odd reason, he found that he wanted to do it with Tony by his side.

See, it was odd, because that wasn't his mindset even five minutes ago. But then again, ten minutes ago he wasn't sure.

Everything was confusing.

Peter wanted to sleep.

Tony cleared his throat, and started to pull away. But Peter fell victim to the sound of Tony's love, and didn't want this to end just yet. So he moved backwards with Tony and made a sound at the back of his throat, a silent teenager-esque plea for more. This elicited a chuckle from the billionaire, who gladly followed through with the request.

They stood there for a while. Neither were aware of how long. Just long enough that traffic cleared, and at some point FRIDAY closed the doors on the Audi.

Finally, when Tony's arms started losing feeling and his legs were protesting from staying in one place for so long, he swallowed. "Pete," he started, "we need to move, and we should probably talk about... About May, kid."

Yeah, Peter knew.

So, albeit reluctantly, he unlatched himself. Backed up a little, then cleared his throat too. Refused to look at Tony, instead favoring the crack in the sidewalk next to him. Tony sighed, before turning

his hand into a fist and lightly hitting Peter's shoulder.

“So, now that I have a new perspective on things, how about we talk business. Job, living arrangements, all the works.”

Peter smiled, closing his eyes. Something told him to go ahead, tell Tony. The road block that was there before was now pummeled into the ground, and he could share the news. Somehow, in those few minutes where Tony hugged Peter like his life depended on it, they gained back just enough trust. Enough momentum to get the ball rolling.

He took a deep breath, and started.

Chapter End Notes

SAME NOTES AS BEGINNING, STILL JUST AS IMPORTANT

1. For my old readers (and news for my new readers) you may have noticed that I've added an extra chapter to the chapter count. Why, you may ask? Because at 2AM one faithful night I had the most brilliant idea for a twisted ending and I couldn't decide on going with the original ending or following that one. So, I decided that I may as well make both! The last one will be a more dark version, and may even lead to a sequel if the reviews are positive. So, yeah, look out for that.

2. OH MY GOSH SOMEONE MADE A POEM FOR PETER'S GALAXY (in direct reference to the chapter where Tony talks to Stan about everyone being their own galaxies) AND IT'S ABSOLUTELY AMAZING. Please, either before or after this chapter, read it!

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/19084435>

It's so very good and i'm so humbled to receive something of this gravity, like it still brings me immense joy to think about. You guys are amazing.

3. Last thing, I promise. There have been a few comments asking me if Matt is going to be returning. The answer is yes! Not only will he be in this particular story, but me and my wonderful beta decided to co-write a few stories with DareDad as the main dynamic. It won't necessarily all be this Peter and Matt, but it'll definitely be the duo. (That being said, if you guys have any ideas of what you want to see/have, leave a comment! That's always exciting c:)

The End Of All Things

Chapter Summary

Humor and logic. The best way to get through to any teenager, Tony swears.

Peter is caving in on himself slowly.

Blue. Matt felt blue. He couldn't move.

Chapter Notes

Once more, thank you to my wonderful beta for going through this with me!

I'd like to reiterate that even though this is the end, we still have a bonus second ending! That'll be out sometime in the next three weeks, maximum.

And after that, then there'll be a bunch of DareDad oneshots, following Peter and Matt's relationship during the spaces of the story and after with Tony. It'll be great, and a team effort! :)

So, without further ado, here's the finale!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“You know how my uncle died, right?”

Peter decided to start from the beginning. The very beginning. So that way there wouldn't be any missed details, or anything that could eventually be blown over. Luckily, Tony nodded his head.

He heard about it in passing a few times. A few jabs from Peter, and a few inferences of his own. Along with police reports and witness statements that FRIDAY helpfully supplied.

The teen let out a puff of breath, losing the established eye contact to look at the ground once more. His sweatshirt sleeves were pushed down to cover his hands, only the top of his fingers peeking out from the fabric. “Well, yeah. Then you know the whole origin of Spiderman. And you know about how he's fearless and laughs in the face of danger. As well as how he always gets up, no matter what.”

Yes, Tony does know. He's been there for too many fights for him not to know. In fact, if he spent

a few minutes just to think about it, he could pinpoint exactly how Peter's voice doesn't waver when webslinging, how his expressive mask squints as a monster that would make grown men piss their pants screams in his face.

He knows the quiet sounds of pain Peter makes when he slams into concrete, breaking bones and trying to keep it from him.

But he doesn't think of that. No, he refuses. Instead, he stays in the moment and gives the younger one his undivided attention. Something that he hasn't been able to do for months.

"Turns out, that was a fucking lie," he quotes, shrugging and smiling. It takes a few seconds, but eventually it occurs to Tony that he recognizes the sentence from one of the popular seven second videos Peter loves to shout at the top of his lungs. A vine, his brain helpfully supplies.

(*"Hey! I understood that reference!"*

"Sure you did, Capsicle.")

Peter is caving in on himself slowly. His legs are brought close together and his arms were wrapped protectively around his sides. His shoulders are drawn and low, making him appear cold. But with New York's scathing heat, Tony knew that wasn't the case. And if he knew Peter Parker-- which he now strongly doubts-- then he knows what's about to happen. Deflection.

"Uh, you know, maybe we should get in the car? You know, public space and drawing attention, right?"

Bingo.

Still, as benevolent as ever, Tony reacted the same way he used to when Peter did something like this. "Whatever you're most comfortable with, Pete. But we're currently standing in an alley five feet away from my car. Nobody has walked by this entire time, and I doubt anybody is planning on doing so. And, everyone knows not to look down alleyways unless you plan on getting mugged."

Humor and logic. The best way to get through to any teenager, Tony swears.

Peter sighs, knowing the trap he's willingly walking into. "Yeah, I guess you're right." His shoulders were a little looser, though. Less of a coward pose, more average looking. Which, Tony counts as progress.

He dutifully slips back into his role of quiet listener, giving the floor to the teenager once more to continue his story. It took a few moments of breathing in and out slowly, but eventually Peter was ready to continue. "May, she--" he cuts off, swallowing. Tony watched as his eyes became clouded, distant. Reliving the memory, forgetting about his sentence.

So, of course, Tony brought a hand up as an offering.

Just so if Peter wanted to hold his hand or come in for a hug, he could. The movement seemed to bring Pete back, too, because his eyes flew down to track the limb. His cheeks heated in embarrassment, but he didn't take the hand.

Instead, he heaved a deep breath, and finished his sentence. "She died. Right in front of me. And you wanna know the kicker? It was the same exact way Ben did. A gun, a robber, with me standing there paralyzed."

Grief flowed through his words and impacted Tony, sending chills going down his spine. With his vivid memory, he was able to perfectly detail the image in his head on how it must have looked. Spiderman, limbs locked and tense. The shaking gun from unsteady fingers, firing with the bullet ripping through air and landing on its mark. Through, its mark.

Vaguely, he swears he can hear the sound of a body falling.

(He hates that he knows that sound.)

Not giving him the option anymore, Tony surges and grabs onto Peter, holding him and hugging him just as before. But this time, Peter doesn't hesitate. He grabs on like he's being anchored and he has no intention of letting go. Tucked into the crook of Tony's shoulder blade with his forehead resting on his shoulder, heaving deep breaths that rack his small frame. "Shh, shh." Tony consoles, bringing a hand to rest on Peter's curls.

The movement was reminiscent of many of their hugs before. A way to ground Peter, to make him feel better. And feel better, he did. Peter was reminded of the way Matt's fingers felt in his hair, and he quickly noted the differences and similarities in their hands.

“It’s okay, Pete. It’s alright. I got you.” Tony continues, taking his own unsteady inhale. He knew, he *knew* that May had died. But he didn’t realize how much Peter was still affected by it. By the air of confidence he exuded earlier with the truth, Tony never would have guessed.

Then again, there was always the possibility that Peter didn’t realize, either.

“God, Tony, it was *horrible*. I was there, I could have saved her. But I saw the gun pointed at her, and I was just... I was gone. I was there, but I *wasn’t there*.” Peter spilled, floodgates now opened enabling him to share everything. “And then I had to go home knowing what I couldn’t do, and saw the praise I had gotten for doing a good job. But how was that a good job, when the most important person was killed with me there?”

He shook his head, burrowing further into his oversized sweatshirt. Tony opened his mouth to tell Peter that in no way was it his fault, but Peter continued, oblivious to the inhalation of breath. “A- And then I stayed home, wondering why it didn’t feel like home anymore. And then one lousy day, it hit. May was what made that place a home. And then, I knew I couldn’t stay in that apartment for another day.”

Tony knew where this was going, of course he knew where this was going. There was no way he couldn’t call where it was going. But he needed to get a few words out before they continued. “Pete, look at me.” When he refused, Tony told him once more. Finally, Peter lifted his head and met his gaze.

Tony felt his knees go weak at the absolute crushed and dejected look that clouded Peter’s normally bright brown eyes. But then it strikes Tony. They haven’t been bright in a while.

No, instead they’ve been muddy and dark, for lack of better words. Clouded and hidden, aged beyond his body and mind.

Peter looked so *tired*.

So *done*.

And it killed Tony to know that he was a big contributor to that. And, that he couldn’t do much to help.

Regardless, he swallowed away any other description words to get to his point. “Peter, you don’t have to tell me this. Regardless of what you may think, you aren’t obligated to. If it’s too hard, too much, too anything. Tell me, and I’ll back off. We can have this another time when you’re feeling better.”

And of course, Peter being Peter, shook his head in refusal. “No, no. I have to do this, I have to..-” Tony cut him off. “No, kid. You don’t have to do anything, alright?” Both of his hands came to cup Peter’s face, shaking it lightly side to side. “I can wait, Pete. You come first, and if you need a moment, an hour, a day or even a year, I’ll wait.”

‘Because I’ve made you wait this long’ went unsaid. But, both parties still heard the words.

Peter looked down, head resting in Tony’s hands. “You know, whenever I think of her, I see a quiet Saturday morning. A gentle morning with promises of a clear day. No homework to do, just a Saturday where I could do what I want. Websling, stay home, or sun bathe. May always gave me this kick-back-and-relax, Saturday-morning kind of feeling.” He shrugged. “I didn’t even notice until she was gone.”

Tony was reminded of his own revelation over his mother after she passed. Except she didn’t remind him of a Saturday morning, she reminded him of a Wednesday evening. Tired to the bone with the only hope being that the week is almost over. Sitting next to her on the piano playing a soft song that she created, watching as the sun set over the horizon.

He wondered if imagining relatives as certain times of days meant anything.

“I was chased out of school.”

Hold up.

Tony furrowed his brows, wondering if he missed anything when picturing his mother. Because that? That’s quite a large gap from May being home, or her being a Saturday morning. But Peter didn’t show any signs of confusion, so maybe he meant it to be taken at shock value.

“Or, not really chased. But I went to school and social workers were there, and I couldn’t go with them. Duh. So I fled. Put on the suit and went back, got as much as stuff as I could carry, and left. I have no idea what happened to the rest.” He said the last part quietly, saddened by the thought.

Tony vowed to track down anyone and everyone who may know, and try his damndest to get the material back to Peter.

The teen stepped away from the embrace, clearing his throat and bringing his hand under his nose to wipe it with one finger. A nervous habit, but not one of his. Tony pegged it as the other man, and felt himself bristle just slightly.

And then get mad at himself for doing so.

But Peter didn't notice, instead shifting his weight so that he rested on one leg. Then, he stretched his arms out as if showing off the alleyway. "And that's how I started my life on the road. Or rather, on the web." His hands came down with a dull *thunk* against his pant legs. "I spent most of my time as Spiderman saving people. Mainly because it was easier than being Peter Parker, but also because that way I knew at least somebody was getting saved."

And there it was.

That last part.

'That way I knew at least somebody was getting saved.'

If it were anybody else, they would've felt pity for the boy. Proud, even.

Not Tony.

Well, actually yes. Yes Tony felt pity, because that sentence was like a stab straight through his portable arc reactor.

Because Tony was supposed to be the one to save him.

It went unspoken, just as many things had, but this was the hitter. The final bang. The thing that would send Tony spiralling into a pit of despair and self hate. Every bad thing that he could feel, hit him faster than anything he could catch.

Peter said it before. He waited for Tony, waited for someone to help him. Because Tony had always done that before. Regardless if it was as Peter or Spiderman.

If Peter needed help with one of his school assignments, Tony was right next to him proof reading his work and giving him ideas.

If Spiderman was facing beings higher than his abilities could handle, Iron Man was there to watch his six.

If Peter had lost his aunt and was homeless, Tony was nowhere to be seen,

“I’m sorry” he blurted out, mouth working faster than his mind. Peter blinked at him, but Tony wasn’t finished. “God, kid. I know I’m supposed to be sitting here and listening, but I just have to say that. I’m so sorry. You shouldn’t have had to go through that. Any of that.”

Peter cocked his head to the side, focusing on something. Tony had no idea what, until he remembered another one of Peter’s little ticks. Listening to heart beats of familiar people.

Distinctly, he remembers one night where Peter told him what his heart sounded like. The night where Tony felt his heart skip oddly, which caused the teen to flinch next to him.

“Wrong.” He told him. “Your heart sounds wrong. Like, it beats like everyone else’s and stays on a steady rhythm, but it almost echoes. Like what scar tissue sounds like, almost. Except there’s also the faint sound of ringing from metal. Probably from your arc reactor.”

Tony never forgot the next words.

“I like it. It’s you, and you’re always there. I can always pick you out in a crowd, and I know I’m safe, or that I’ll be safe.”

... Where was that safety all those months?

Were there any times where he walked through the streets inconspicuously, with Peter behind him? Just listening? Or were there times where Tony flew around and Peter fled from the faint metallic

thump?

Logically, Tony knew that wasn't possible. He rarely went outside, and when he did, it was on business trips.

Still, it didn't prevent him from feeling like he was iced over.

Whatever Peter was looking for, he must have found it, because he cocked his head back to its original position with a clearer look on his face. "I told you before, your apologies mean nothing." He paused, and then added "but, for what it's worth, thank you."

Hearing those two words, for some reason, made Tony feel marginally better. Not enough to jump for joy, but enough for a small smile to spread across his face. Peter reciprocated the action, looking shy.

And then his smile dropped.

"I almost died, a few times."

Yikes.

"Yeah, you're telling me. Not all of it was from villains, too. Mainly from malnutrition preventing my healing factor from working properly. Gashes and contusions hurt a hell of a lot more when they take the regular amount to heal, rather than the accelerated time. Go figure, amiright?" He attempted to joke, before letting it fall flat.

Tony was speechless, so Peter took the silence as a cue to continue.

"Then, one day, I got *way* over my head. Fully admit that." He brought his arms up as if he was pushing something away from his body. "Drug ring in Hell's Kitchen. I had heard about it for a while, and finally found the base of operations. Went in head first, and as you could probably guess, quickly regretted it."

He laughed a little, and then laughed even harder at seeing the look on Tony's face. "You have no idea how much of cocaine it took them to throw at my face for me to finally feel loopy. It was

horrible, let me tell ya'." He shook his head, and then looked up as if remembering something. "Oh yeah! Then I got shot and blacked out from blood loss. Really thought that was the finishing move, too."

Tony thought he was gonna be sick.

Everything about that radiated disaster, and Peter was just sitting on top of it as if it were a present. The fact that he could laugh about almost dying disturbed Tony more than anything, and he made yet another mental note to ask Peter how the hell he's getting help for this insanity.

"Yeah, it was crazy." He said quieter, a smile still on his lips and shoulders still shaking from laughter. A complete contrast to the boy a few minutes ago, but Tony guessed that he'd take what he could get.

"Luckily, Daredevil was there to save me."

Tony retracted that statement.

He wouldn't take what he could get, especially if it involved Daredevil. The things he heard about that man were short of astounding. Cold, hard, brutal. Doesn't take anything from anyone and is a mysterious enigma that should be avoided at all costs, especially if you wanted to keep all of your bones in one piece.

And yet, he saved Peter?

The man wasn't known as someone to take pity. But then again, he *is* also a vigilante who saves innocents and enacts justice on the few unlucky souls who get on his radar.

Peter, oblivious to the absolute shock that painted Tony's face, continued on with his story. "I don't remember the first few minutes, but I know it took me less than three full days to figure out his secret identity."

Oh heart attack, have you finally come to claim Tony?

First, Peter gets shot. And then, he gets saved by the man who claims he's the devil. To which, Tony can't even say for certain that he isn't.

The man is scary.

And even after all that, Peter manages to turn around and figure out the one thing that the vigilante works the hardest to secure.

And.

And Peter is still alive?

He's even talking about the devil like he's a friend?

Tony truly doesn't know this kid in front of him.

Peter, at this point, has taken to walking on the wall adjacent to Tony, as if anything about this was normal. But when he spoke, his voice was lower. Quieter. "He helped me. A lot. I probably owe him my life." He looked down, hair falling in his face. "With May, with gaining my footing, everything."

A small smile spread across his face, and Tony knew the only way to describe it was a fond one. So he walked up to the wall, looking up slightly. "Yeah? Well, how about you tell me about him?"

Peter froze for a fraction of a second, before deciding to go on. "Well, he has a friend. Named Matt." He looked at Tony for confirmation to keep on going. "Matt's the real one who helped me. He's a lawyer, and him and his merry band of fellows were the ones to take me in when double D couldn't. Gave me a place to live, friends to count on, even got me my job. They've..."

He trailed off, stepping onto the dirty ground once more. "I... They made me into who I am today." Peter said with finality. Tony watched as he cocked his head to the side, questioning. "Memory is a funny thing, y'know?"

Yes, Tony did know.

By the nod of his head, Peter continued. “When I was there with them, in the courtroom to get emancipated, I hardly paid the scene any mind. I never stopped to think of it as something that would make a lasting impression, even though it was quite literally changing my life. I certainly never imagined that in a year, five years, hell, even eighteen years I would recall the scene in such detail. And you wanna know why? Because I didn’t give a damn about the scenery that day. I was thinking of myself, much as I am doing now.”

He took a deep breath, looking at Tony. “So, what I’m trying to get at, is that I want to hear about you. Enough about me, I want to know what you were doing for so long.”

And Tony... He paused.

What *had* he done?

Sure, he went to stock meetings, made more projects, tormented Dum-e and U with dunce hats and fire extinguishers, but that’s what he had done before. To him, nothing had changed. Or nothing as drastically as losing your family, your home, your everything.

He still painted the town light blue with the light of his arc reactor. He still walked around the universe like it was a sick twisted Van Gogh/ Picasso painting that he absolutely refused to ignore. Like he viewed everyone else as idiots for not viewing the stage he was standing on.

Tony was still a savior. Not because anyone needed it, but because he needed to save someone. There wasn’t a magical dragon, there wasn’t a tower, there wasn’t even fifty feet worth of long blonde hair. There was just him, the spotlight he was under, and everyone else.

And of course, everyone was supposed to applaud for the mighty Iron Man. The marvelous Tony Stark. The billionaire, playboy, philanthropist, engineer, faux dad.

Because it’s absolutely unimaginable that he be anything else.

So he kept it up. Didn’t do anything else, didn’t be anything else. Because he kept up his public identity while his personal withered in loneliness. Drank itself into oblivion, only to take a short power nap and get back to it.

Tony hadn't really done anything.

At all.

Peter must have seen the realization on his face, because he looked shocked for a few seconds. He looked down, nodded his head as if confirming to himself something he didn't want to voice out loud, before chewing on his bottom lip.

A feeling of inadequacy washed over Tony, like he had failed Peter in some way. And if he spent a few minutes, he knew that he could figure it out. But as it was, they didn't have a few minutes. Because minutes, seconds, hours, all of it. It was all a blessing, something that could be taken away at the blink of an eye.

And too much time had been wasted already by doing nothing.

"I met a guy," Tony blurted, surprised by his own words. Peter looked up confused, no doubt asking for elaboration. "O-kay," Peter replied, dragging out the 'o'. "Congratulations? Should I... I don't know, keep it a secret?"

Tony squinted, before realization dawned on him. "Oh, God no!" He pretended to throw up in his mouth, shaking his body as if he had the chills. "No, his name is Stan and he is very much not someone I would ever be interested in. At least, not in that way."

His extreme reaction was enough to get Peter to laugh, so at least he counted that as a win. "No, he, uh... He sort of became my therapist. But unpaid, I guess." Peter nodded his head, before bringing his arm to rest on his other, hand positioned in front of his mouth. "You mean, like a friend?" He questioned, like the genius he was.

And of course, like the idiot *he* was, Tony stood gobsmacked. "Yeah, yeah I guess he is."

It probably said something about his character; the fact that he expected people to take his money when he told them about his problems, and didn't even connect them as a friend until a seventeen year old kid did it for him.

(But that was a thought for another time. Preferably, at three AM in the sanctitude of his lab, scotch in hand.)

“Anyways,” he drawled, “he really helped me. Let me talk and then listened. Got my mind off of whatever I was thinking about, which ironically was about you. That’s how we met, by the way.” A smile stretched on his face. “He thought I died on a bench in Central Park. Came and checked on me only to see that I was as sentient as I am now.”

Peter tilted his head curiously once more, into what Tony was determining a new habit. “I have so many questions about that,” he decided on saying, “but I’m going to let you continue.”

With a nod, Tony continued. “He was the one I mentioned earlier, by the way. Truly do think you’d like him.”

And then they lapsed into silence once more.

It was obvious, now. Peter shuffling around, the cut off sentences, the courtesy. He wanted to be somewhere else, but he was holding off for Tony. He genuinely wanted to listen, to help. But at the same time, he didn’t want to be here.

Tony felt bad.

A few more wasteful seconds passed by, before he decided to jump back on track. “How are you dealing? With May’s death, of course.” Peter made eye contact, like he was thankful that there was a conversation starter. “I’m, uh, you know.-” He shrugged. “-Dealing. As much as I can, at least.”

Tony nodded, but Peter continued. “For a long time, she held a special place in my heart. How could she not? She was my Aunt, afterall. She raised me, was basically my mother. I kept this special place for her, like a “Reserved” sign on a quiet corner table hidden in the very back of a restaurant.” He gestured to his chest, before sighing. “Despite, you know, the fact that I would never see her again.”

“Of course it hurts. How could it not? Even months later, with that restaurant closed down and infested with cobwebs and mice and everything in between, that small corner table will always hold that sign. She’ll always have a special place in there, with me.” He sighed with a small smile. “I know that no matter what, she’ll never leave me. Not in that sense.”

When they made eye contact, Tony noticed something. A dull light, a sparkle. One that wasn’t there before. Upon closer inspection, he realized it was the galaxy. The one that was dark and deserted.

There, right there, were the stars. The cowardly ones, now adventuring out. Winning the fight against the darkness. Regrouping, growing stronger. That light that had faded was now twinkling daringly, life breathing in and out with every passing second.

Tony laughed quietly. How could he ever doubt that Peter was ever anything but exceptional? Of course his stars, his sun, would shine bright once more. Even if for a few moments. That boy was nothing but a fighter, it would make sense that even metaphorically that rang true.

“What are you looking at?” Peter questioned, a small smile tugging at his lips. Tony shook his head in disbelief, before clapping his hands together. Ignoring the hidden part of him that was yelling at himself not to get so sentimental. He let out a breathless laugh once more, before gesturing to the alley around them. “Sometimes when I look at you, I feel like I’m gazing at a distant star.”

He looked up at the darkening sky, a sense of calmness washing over him. The euphoria spread to Peter, as he did the same. “It’s dazzling, but the light is from tens of thousands of years ago. Decades have passed, and everybody is none the wiser of it. Maybe that star doesn’t even exist anymore, there would be no way for me to know.” He looked back down at Peter, the twinge of love nipping at his insides. “Yet sometimes, that light seems more real than anything else that is happening.”

They made eye contact once more, and Tony could see the way that his words had affected Peter. Saw it in his stance, the small upwards turn of his lips. He even watched as something clouded his expression like a blanket, dampening the small rebellion in his eyes.

“What if that star *is* dead?” He questioned. “What if it was dead, killed by something as small and simple as loneliness. It knew that nobody was there, nobody knew it existed. What if it was too much?”

Tony didn’t even think. He just reacted.

His arms extended and grabbed at Peter, jerking him forwards into a hug once more. This one, tighter than the others. Tried to convey as much as he could without words with his actions. Squeezed him just a bit to invoke feelings of warmth, safety, and love. Tried to get Peter to feel at least a small bit of momentary salvation from the bitter cruelty of his life, his reality.

Peter responded by breathing in his scent, and sinking into his shoulder. Melting into the embrace,

like he missed the feeling of being hugged like he was safe.

Tony licked his lips, and tried to phrase his thoughts into the careful metaphor they weaved, “Well, I would find a way to tell that star that that loneliness? ...With it’s cold grip that seems to take over your body and your soul, and bullies you into pushing everyone away? Whispering that everything will be better that way?”

The teen nodded in his shoulder, humming an ‘mhm’.

“Well, I would tell it that’s bullshit. A star shouldn’t listen to the voice telling him that if he’s gone he’ll have no reminder of what he’s lost. That the empty feeling in his chest, how it burns...yet feels nothing at the same time. That feeling won’t go away by just denying its presence.”

There was a wet patch on his shoulder, and Tony felt his eyes welling up with tears. He felt wrong; out of place. Like it wasn’t his position to tell the kid all of this, and that someone else was supposed to take his role. But with Peter clutching onto him like it would be the last time he would feel this type of warmth, Tony felt like he had to continue.

“You’re not okay, kiddo. And that’s okay.”

And there was the simple truth.

They weren’t okay. There was no actual conesus for the word ‘Okay’, just what was deemed appropriate by the hierarchy of society. By the definition of the word, they weren’t anything close.

But with those seven words, that wonderful oxymoron, it seemed to represent everything about them. There was no basis for the word, they just had what they could go off of. And just like their situation, all they had to do was build off of it. Create new memories, share more stories. Become better. Become more than the word ‘okay.’

Peter choked out a small sob, and Tony just held him.

They stood there for a little while longer, long enough for the traffic to finally clear out. For the sun to set, for the nightcrawlers to start roaming the streets in pursuit of bars and local clubs.

When the tears dried and the moment was extended for too long, they separated once more. Tony wrung his hands together with the absence, and he broke the silence once more. “What do you want to do, Pete?”

Peter smiled a watery smile, eyes red and puffy against his pale skin. He stood there engulfed in his sweatshirt, looking smaller yet bigger than ever. “I want... I want to talk more, like, out of this alley.” He backed away, spinning around slowly with a small smile on his face. The smile of acceptance, of peace. “I have a million things to talk to you about. All I want in this world is to hang out more, do more. I want to see you and talk. I want the two of us to begin everything from the beginning.”

He stopped his motions when he was facing Tony once more. “I don’t want to go back to how we were. I want us to be better.”

Tony couldn’t help the smile that spread across his face. For the first time in months, when he felt hope bloom in his chest, he let it grow. Let it spread through every part of him, because he knew with finality that it wouldn’t lead to his demise in the future. That it could reside with him, and wouldn’t promise the inevitable crushing feeling that plagued him for months.

“Yeah. Yeah, I’d like that, kid.”



Most writers *love* to say that things begin in silence.

The beginning of the day, when you first wake up and your senses haven’t fully rebooted after a long night.

Humidity in the air that lingers right before the first droplets of rain crash onto the pavement.

The awkward silence before a first kiss, unsurety floating through the atmosphere right before metaphorical fireworks explode.

Matt, however, knows that all of those writers are complete bullshit.

The second he wakes up, his senses don't give him reprieve. He hears the old couple on 47th and 5th arguing for the seventh time this week if they should buy asparagus or not. Smells the cat piss from the apartment next to him. Feels the old couch under his fingers, blanket coating his frame.

His senses also pick up on the fact that Peter wasn't there.

If he could see, Matt would be looking around confusedly. But as it is, all he did was furrow his brows and tilt his head ever so slightly, trying to remember why his body felt like it had been through the ringer and how he ended up on his couch, rather than his lovely bed.

He licked his chapped lips, grimacing at the taste left in his mouth from his slumber. Passed out for a while, then.

When he got up from his horizontal position, his spooky blind man vision did the equivalent of spinning vertigo, sending pain shooting through his aching head. Questions ran through his mind, answers fleeting.

What happened, and where was Peter?

Matt reached out with his senses once more, and was close to mortified when he checked his room. The old twinge of blood, obviously poorly scrubbed out from his silk sheets. His suit laying haphazardly on the ground in pieces, strange cuts on the Kevlar protection. His burner phone, on the desk.

So, clearly this was Claire's doing.

A sigh erupted from his body, and he quickly regretted it. Pain lit up throughout his body, starting at his calves and lingering through his mainframe. Vaguely, he remembered getting beat to hell stopping Fisk.

Fisk.

Matt stumbled ever so slightly, reaching out to feel his wall.

Memories came crashing back onto him like a tidal wave, erupting and wrapping him in a blanket of discomfort.

His silk sheets soaking up his blood. Peter trying to talk to him through the haze of depletion, getting him to make some semblance of sense. Pain, unadulterated pain ripping through his core and demanding him to fall under the trance laid upon him, beckoning him to give in.

Salt in the air. Peter crying.

Vibrations. Shaking hands? Unsteady, like a wounded animal.

Movement. Around him, encompassing him. Stitches? Him getting stitched up. Gentle hands, sure movements. No shaking, not Peter. Claire.

Something in his mouth. Small, chalky taste. Another. Pills? Cold liquid right after, drowning the awful feeling and sending a shiver down his spine. Jostling injuries, a groan. From him? Of course from him.

Soft whispers of reassurances, far away. Across the room? Claire, no doubt. Her comforting Peter?

Peter.

Matt trying to move. To get to Peter, to hug him. Wipe away the warmth pooling from his eyes and run a hand over his hair.

Nothing happening. The medication, no doubt.

Blue. Matt felt blue. He couldn't move.

That voice telling him to fall under sounded a lot nicer, this time around.

Matt found himself listening, and falling into a trance.

... But even with that, there still had to have been a time skip from him falling asleep to him waking up now. The rays from outside were a little too cold for it to still be the same day. Night? Whatever.

He stumbled awkwardly into the kitchen, grabbing a mug from on top of his counter and pouring water in it. Vaguely, he noticed that his glasses were sitting a few feet away.

One hand brought the mug to his mouth while the other went for his glasses, carefully putting them over his eyes and concealing his damaged irises. His throat felt immensely better than before.

He went through his daily routine slow as molasses, barely lifting his feet from the ground to do his business in the bathroom, then to clean up the tragedy in his room. The pull of his stitches felt nice, like a constant reminder of what he had to go through to ensure the safety of the members of Hell's Kitchen.

Matt nearly dropped his armor once he remembered that Peter was supposed to take the test at his school to ensure his early graduation.

He really did drop it once he realized that, yeah. That's probably what happened in the blank space of time.

And then he promptly jumped back and definitely let out a manly squeal when his toes were crushed.

That pain right there? That wasn't so nice.

Matt honed his senses on Peter's smell in the apartment; the soft warm smell of sunflowers mixed with the dull coldness of pine trees after a rainy day. When most of the smell lingered on the couch where Matt happened to wake up, he groaned in realization.

Peter had to have made a deal with Claire to drug him every couple of hours so that he would stay satiated enough to heal before he jumped back out into the fray.

That was the only explanation for the abscess of time. Matt wouldn't have missed the big day any

other way. A part of him felt guilty that Peter had to go through it alone, but another part of him told him to suck it up. Peter was a big boy, and he had done things alone before.

Still.

Didn't mean he couldn't be there.

To clear his thoughts about Peter's whereabouts, Matt decided to take a shower. Which, as always when injured, was more of a chore than anything. He had to be careful of his movements, bruises not appreciating even the light feeling of water beating on his skin and contusions not liking anything about the event.

Once he couldn't smell any more blood on his person and felt like his skin was rubbed raw, Matt stepped out and changed. Toweled his hair, and noticed that Peter still wasn't home.

Of course, by now, Matt had noticed the pill bottle sitting next to his fridge. He went to reach for it, only to hesitate.

It was late, incredibly late.

Peter still wasn't home.

...

Matt retracted his hand, and made an about face. Straight for his second armor suit, his completely black one. In the back of his mind, he imagined Claire yelling at him and Peter shaking the medication in front of his face. But alas, his concerns for Peter rang deeper than his concern for himself.

Naturally.

It didn't take long for him to sniff out where Peter went. Thankfully, it seemed that he only went on a walk rather than patrolling. His scent stayed close to the ground, rather than high in between the buildings of Hell's Kitchen.

When Matt stepped out of his territory, however, he was debating on just leaving Peter to return home on his own free will.

But that was until he noticed that the scent changed from the sidewalk and to the road. Matt rolled his eyes, chastising the kid for not knowing the simple Stranger Danger rule, and continued to slink through the shadows.

It wasn't long until he found himself in a crowded area once more, surrounded with buildings as opposed to the suburban area he was just in. Matt parkoured onto the roof to avoid prying eyes, only to slip down into an alleyway that practically radiated Peter.

And... Someone else.

Matt bristled and vaguely wished that he had his red costume, since that one struck more fear than his black one. But then he paused with recognition.

That smell...

Big sweatshirts. Printed letters, feeling faded. Shaped neatly, MIT. Peter wearing it, talking about a late mentor.

Tony Stark was here with Peter.

Matt squinted and bared his teeth in confusion, wondering what the billionaire was doing with his kid. After all the stories he had heard containing pain and turmoil caused by him, all he wanted to do was wrap Peter in a warm blanket and hope that his evil look would scare Stark away from ever hurting him again.

... He tilted his head, wondering when he became so possessive. Protective.

Dully, the thought was filed away for a later date. For now, he had a teenager to reprimand for being out so late.

He lifted his head, sniffing the air. Waded through the gross smells of New York, zoning in on the two. Followed the picture painted through scent all the way to a tower. A rather large tower. In the back of his mind, a memory was tugged. Back when he could see.

A beacon of hope. Light blue windows, a large structure, the tallest building in New York.

The Avengers tower.

Stark tower?

Matt didn't know. He was too sober for that shit.

Either way, he sighed like a petulant teenager and made his way back onto the rooftops, bouncing and dancing across to a pattern not yet learned.

Finally, when he was three blocks away, Matt didn't have to focus on smell. Instead, he heard the telltale fluttering of Peter's rapid heartbeat. Faster than average, but at a resting rate for a spider powered vigilante. A small smile broke onto his face mid flip once he picked up on the rhythmic pounding, a sense of warmth flooding through him.

Peter was okay, Peter was safe.

Peter was going to wish he never went out once Matt was done with him.

At around a block and a half, he picked up on the conversation. Peter's excited vibrado blending in nicely with the deep tones Matt had only had the pleasure of hearing on television.

"-course, Mr. Stark! That would be so cool!"

"Yeah, kid? So you'd want to start working here again?"

Matt stopped cold on whatever roof he was on. His feet grounded on the pavement, and he was huffing with exertion on his poor broken body. Adrenaline had kept him functioning this far, but with the sudden drop, he was quickly regretting all the twists and flips.

Was... Was Peter leaving him?

After all that they had been through? Matt felt... He felt used, almost. Cold. Like winter had descended early and snow gripped at his boots, and his enhanced senses reveled in the fact that they could make Matt feel like a literal icicle on a mildly cold day.

He heard the way that Stark's heartbeat jumped slightly in anticipation. Excitement. Probably something on Peter's face.

Matt was getting ready to turn around and make the long trek back to Hell's Kitchen, when-

"Not necessarily. I told you, I already have a job. But I would love to come and internship here some days, whenever I'm not busy?"

Peter posed it as a question, but Matt heard it as a statement.

Tony must've heard it that way because he sniffed. Rustling? Movement. Brushed his hand under his nose, cocked his hip and put his other hand on it.

"Alright, name your price. I'll buy the place, and-"

"No."

"... One hundred thou-"

"No."

"... Two hun-"

"Tony, no."

“Damn it.”

Matt laughed. Full on belly laughed. Just the absurdity of the entire conversation was enough to send his earlier trepidation running. Of course Peter wouldn't leave him hanging. The kid knew all too much what that felt like, and there wasn't a single reason why he would enact the same feelings on someone else.

Soft whooshing. Hair moving, pointing down? Stark looking up. Faux exasperation rolled off of him, enough for Matt to pick up on it from even this distance.

“Alright, kid. You strike a hard bargain. How about I give you a place to live in the tower, eh? Free of cost, of course. You could--”

His laughter was gone.

Of course, Matt knew that Tony was being hospitable. It was painfully obvious that in the gap of his nap, Peter went out and somehow found Tony and made things okay again. Better than okay, if their banter was anything to prove for it.

But him pushing Peter into these choices? A new job, a place to live, something about it unsettled Matt.

Maybe it was too close to what he had done when he found Peter; taken him in, given him a place to relax.

Gave him a new relationship, one as his father.

Thankfully, Peter knew what he was doing.

“Tony, I already have a place to live. I've told you this. I'm happy with where I'm at, content with what I'm doing. Nothing about that needs to change just because you're now in the equation.”

And... Wow.

What a way to put it.

Matt sat at the edge of the building, legs dangling off the side. Hunched over, arms resting on his knees and hands holding each other. He realized now that he was sitting on top of an apartment. There was sixty two people inside, with only seven of them up.

He was impressed with Peter, with the way he could talk to the billionaire as if he wasn't an interdimensional icon. No, Peter talked to him as if he were an overeager puppy who needed reprimanding.

Respect, man.

Matt had no doubt that he would do the same if he were to ever be in the same room as Tony, but it was still cool to hear someone else doing it. Especially if that someone else was a seventeen year old genius.

A shock went up his spine once he realized that he would probably be in the same room as the hero, now that him and Peter had made up.

God, he hoped that the building was at least ADA compliant.

He realized that he was sucked too far into his thoughts, and had missed parts of the conversation. Sending a silent curse to himself, he honed back on the two.

“-Think about it, Pete. It's too early--”

“Don't you mean late, Mr. Stark?”

“--By your definition. Either way, you shouldn't be out wandering the streets. I have a guest room for you to stay in, just until there's actual light outside. Whaddya say?”

Hesitancy rolled off of Peter. Movement, then rustling. Hand in hair? Scratching. A nervous tick.

“I don't know, M-- my roomie may not approve of me being out.” A pause. “Actually, I don't even know if he's awake yet. His pain meds probably wore out by now, actually.”

Matt smiled ruefully, hearing that Peter was at least attempting to keep his identity a secret. Making a split second decision, he reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone. He hissed at the movement, but went to Peter's contact nonetheless.

'He's right, you know. Stay. Have fun, squirt. I'll see you tomorrow.'

He clicked send, and heard the vibrations coming from Peter's pocket. "Oh, shoot, hold on." Soft rustling, the click of a button.

Silence.

More movement, a gesture? Showing the phone to Stark.

"...Dude. Does your roomie have camera in here?"

"Nah, man. He just.. He *knows*."

Matt laughed, and then winced. Got up, and made his way back to Hell's Kitchen with a smile.

Chapter End Notes

And there we have it!! The ending!!!

Thank you guys so much for this wild ride! When I typed the last word, there was a literal wave of shock that washed over me. I can't believe we're done. This has been such a constant in my life for the better half of eight months, so now that it's over? Insane. Absolutely unfathomable.

What am I supposed to do after I finish the bonus chapter?? Chill for a bit before starting on the oneshots??

yike.

Anyways, once more, thank you guys for joining me on this wild ride. I'll catch you later <3

In The Darkness, He Thrives

Chapter Summary

Every good story must come to an end. A happy one, a sad one, an ambiguous one. Whatever gets the pages closed.

My story is now at its end. Or rather, its second end.

Now, it'll stay for a while. On the front of ao3, on the back on people's minds.

And then, it'll be gone.

Forgotten through the land of stories, trampled by new works.

So until that time comes, please. Enjoy this last bit before it's gone.

Chapter Notes

And here it is! The Dark Ending™!

I literally wrote this in an hour and a half and then spent two days consulting my beta and my friend on whether anything should be changed.

It's short, it's simple, it's to the point. It's angsty, it's hurtful, it's perfect.

I'll keep these notes short and leave the speech for the end notes, so without further ado, here's the final ending :)

(almost forgot, thank you to my wonderful beta for all of the help! You're amazing, amiga!)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He stopped his motions when he was facing Tony once more. "I don't want to go back to how we were. I want us to be better."

Tony couldn't help the smile that spread across his face. For the first time in months, when he felt hope bloom in his chest, he let it grow. Let it spread through every part of him, because he knew with finality that it wouldn't lead to his demise in the future. That it could reside with him, and

wouldn't promise the inevitable crushing feeling that plagued him for months.

"Yeah. Yeah, I'd like that, kid."

Tony clapped his hands once more, rocking on the balls of his feet. Now that they had gotten that over with, what was there to do?

Smile at Peter, say thank you for giving him another chance, and waltz off back to solitude? Let Peter walk all the way back to wherever he came from, this late at night? Invite him over?

This was new territory.

Now, Tony wasn't a heathen.

He knew that he couldn't do two of those options. One on the grounds that it's just rude and a complete step back from where they worked so hard to get, and the other because Spiderman or not, he was still Peter. And Peter had a problem with showing off his powers, come an unexpected burglar or a too-handsy pedestrian.

This part of town, Tony was almost expecting something like that to happen.

Peter seemed to be having the same thoughts, because he looked behind his shoulder at the street, ergo, the Audi. Ran a hand through his unruly curls, and then sighed.

"Maybe I should leave. Get home."

... Tony stopped thinking for about two seconds.

His brain did a complete reboot with the realization that Peter *expected* him to drive off. To leave him here so he could walk to wherever he was gonna drop. And if that wasn't an eye opener, Tony didn't know what was. Because that was just plain cruel, even he could determine that.

(And that was saying something, with his shitty behavior over the past couple of months.)

He stopped his movements and moved one arm out, almost as if reaching for Peter. "Uh, no. Hold on," he started, not really sure where he was gonna go with it.

Was he gonna give the kid a ride back to his place? Would Peter even trust him enough to give him the address? Or was Tony gonna extend a place in the tower for him? Of course, there were enough guest bedrooms to house at least twelve large families. That's excluding the previously occupied rooms. But which option would Peter choose?

Well, he would never know unless he asked, now would he?

He cleared his throat, looking off to the side. Above Peter's shoulder, slightly to the left. "How about this." *God, why was he nervous?* "I'll give you two choices. Either you give me your address and I drop you off at whatever dinky place you're living at--" Peter made a face, snorting at the good natured jab "--Or you can come with me. Crash at the tower. I'll even let you use Cap's old space, if you wanted. Or Black Widow's, if that's more your pace." He wiggled his eyebrows suggestively, and reveled in the choke he gained in response.

"Ton- Wha- No! God, what are you, twelve?" Peter managed to get out in between laughs. Tony let a large smile spread across his face, happy for the comedic relief after the heavy questions.

Once the teen calmed down,-- or calmed down enough for an answer, his face was still as red as his suit-- he looked at Tony. Then down at his phone which he picked from his pants pocket, and then back up again. "Well..." His eyes drifted to his phone once more, before he shrugged. "It'll be easier if I just crashed at the tower, wouldn't it?" He decided, pocketing the phone. "I'll send a text when we get there so my roomie knows where I'm at."

Tony couldn't help the smile that spread across his face. A part of him felt like this was a large victory, like he won a war. This entire thing was a large show of trust, one that he wasn't even entirely sure he gained back yet. It was almost like asking your friend if you could spend the night at their house, despite not talking for years and then suddenly meeting up in the middle of a Starbucks.

You know what? Scratch that. That's a little too close to home, actually.

His smile was contagious, because soon Peter had a matching grin. "Great!" Tony said, clapping once more before dropping his hands and moving towards the car. He passed Peter up, and couldn't stop the shrill of happiness that flooded through him when he heard the soft pitter patter of the teen following him.

Ever the gentle-bot, FRIDAY opened the doors to the Audi once they got close enough to the car. Peter's face lit up and he glanced at Tony, and suddenly there wasn't a bit of darkness in his eyes. All Tony could see were the stars shining through and through.

God, he adored this kid.

"Alright, FRI," he started, climbing in his seat. Peter took a little longer, instead inspecting the exterior of the car like the absolute nerd he was, "How's that traffic?" From where he was at, it had cleared. But that didn't mean that downtown didn't still have build-up. He waited for her answer, tilting his head ever so slightly to the side when she didn't respond quickly. "FRI, honey?" He asked once more, looking at the top of the car where one of her cameras were located.

"M...Mr. Stark..." Peter said from the outside of the car. Tony shrugged him off, instead pulling out his phone to check how long it would take to get to the tower. He pulled up the online maps, and was a little surprised to see that all of the traffic was gone. He squinted, before pulling up FRIDAY's diagnostics.

There was a scuffle outside, before the sound of something falling. Probably something of Peter's. "You okay out there, bud?" He called out, reading through the lines of her coding.

It only took a few seconds to see what was wrong. There, right in the middle of her coding, were a bunch of lines of indescribable dialogue. Tony pursed his lips and squinted once more, trying to get a read out of it.

And then, it hit him.

It was a blocking code.

Someone blocked FRIDAY from the Audi; confined her to the tower.

And then, he realized Peter never answered.

Shortly after, he came to the harrowing realization that Peter had nothing heavy to drop. Nothing to make a heavy thunk on the ground like before.

Nothing but himself.

Tony barely had his fingers to his fiercely glowing arc reactor before something stabbed him in the neck. White, searing hot pain blasted through his veins and incapacitated his movements.

Someone was grabbing at his reactor, ripping at it. Trying to shred it, get it off of him. He couldn't even lift a finger to stop them.

He didn't even realize he was down until he felt a solid surface under his face, and the car horn swimming in the distance of the haze that clouded his senses.

Whatever he was injected with was strong. Incredibly strong. Strong enough to work in a few short seconds, enough to apparently knock Peter out. Horse tranquilizer? Elephant repellant?

Tony's vision went blurry, and something called him off in the distance. Within arms reach, yet so far away.

Something was wrong.

Something was so, *so* incredibly wrong. Nothing was working. Not FRIDAY, not his hands, not his nanotech, not even his damn mind.

Darkness clouded his eyes faster than he could handle.

The thing that was calling him was now screaming at him, demanding that he listen. Follow the voice, don't hesitate.

The darkness reached out, and Tony met it half way.

Something was wrong.

Peter knew that much as soon as Tony went in the car.

It was like the seat that he sat in was a remote control, turning on his Spidey sense. Lightning cracked up his back and he felt himself go ramrod straight. Saw how his vision blurred with his eyes going out of focus, reminiscent of the days where he needed to wear glasses. Felt how his muscles tensed, jolting into fight mode. Heard the way his blood began to race, pumping through his veins. Tasted how the air became clearer, like he could pinpoint each and every chemical that floated through his slightly open mouth.

Something was wrong. So incredibly wrong.

“*Tony*,” he whispered. He knew that the man didn’t hear him, of course he didn’t. Even with Peter’s enhanced hearing, *he* had a difficult time knowing if he was the one who made a sound.

Someone was coming from behind him, but when he whipped around, nobody was there.

His Spidey sense graduated from a sharp tang in his spine to an absolute inferno taking over his entire body. His muscles clenched and unclenched, telling him to *RUN*, to *MOVE*, yet

Nothing

Was

There.

He looked left to right, putting his fists up. In the back of his head, he heard Tony talking about how FRI was offline. Something told him that wasn’t a coincidence.

Peter opened his mouth to get Tony’s attention once more, to tell him that something was wrong,

when he felt it.

Straight in the neck, like a deep vice, a needle. A fucking needle that appeared out of mid air that was currently injecting something in his system.

You know, sometimes, Peter wishes his Spidey sense was a person.

Just so whenever he ran into them, he could beat them senseless for being absolutely useless when he needed them.

He jerked away, but the damage was done. Already he felt whatever it was coursing through his system, and vaguely his chemist brain was applauding the fast acting chemicals. But then, of course, the sensible part of his brain was running frantically around because whatever he was injected with was actually working, and doing a damn good job at knocking him out.

“M... Mr. Stark...” He got out, right before his legs started turning into metaphorical jelly. He swayed side to side, arm resting on the trunk of the forest green Audi, before eventually giving up. His legs buckled from under him, and he tumbled to the ground ungracefully.

Hey, at least one benefit of his senses rapidly being dulled out was that his Spidey sense wasn't acting super wack anymore. Take all you can get, right?

But at the same time, Peter was stressed out. Of course he was, Tony was in danger. *Oh God, Tony.* He tried to turn his head, move his fingers, do literally anything. All he got was a little head nudge, before he lost the ability to move even that. He had a clear shot of the door, though. Along with a clear shot of his captors' black combat boots.

Vaguely, there was a scuffle. Possibly Tony fighting back, possibly Tony losing. Black dots clouded his vision, and Peter prayed to whatever God was out there that this wasn't the end. That he wasn't dying.

Just that thought alone was enough to send his sluggish brain into a failed rapid fire. Oh God, he didn't want to die. No, not now! He couldn't do that to Matt, to Foggy, to Karen. He had *just* gotten better, just got back to where he needed to be.

The plea to stay alive was such a stark contrast to the last time he pleaded to a God. A literal

antithesis to that thought.

His eyes closed.

There were hands on him. Moving him, putting him upright.

Burnt cedar wood. Grapes. The dull scent of cologne.

Peter tried his damndest to remember that. Knew that if he managed to survive this, whatever this was, that would be his key to identify his attacker.

Another weight on him. A body?

Tony.

Slow breaths. A dull pulse. Alive, but sleeping.

That, at least was a comfort.

Something tugged at his conscious. Made him stumble, almost fall. Whatever it was, tugged at him once more. Stronger. Harsher. More demanding.

Peter had no choice but to listen.

But right before he did, he picked up on two words. Two words muttered right next to his ear, sounding like they came from an open mouthed smile. Two fucking words that sent chills running down his nonfunctioning body.

Two words that sealed his and Tony's fate.

Two words that he knew would haunt him, if he somehow managed to survive.

Right before he slipped into unconsciousness, he heard those two words muttered right along with an irregular beating heart.

“Hail HYDRA.”



Nowhere in Hell’s Kitchen was safe.

Nobody.

Was.

Safe.

It had been that way for the past week. It had become a rumor at first, one whispered between two perps left broken and beaten in front of an alley.

Daredevil was *pissed*.

Everyone shrugged them off at first. Of course they did. A man dressed up in a devil’s costume who regularly hunts criminals, angry? Well, duh. That’s like saying Donald Duck only wore his shirt and a stupid little hat.

Common logic. Next, please.

But then it was more than two criminals.

So, *so* much more than those two criminals.

Uppercut here, avoid the knife there. Movement from the left, dodging.

Large crime syndicates, brought to their knees overnight. Big shots, sobbing at the feet of police officers. Begging for a sentence, just for a reprieve from the Devil of Hell's Kitchen.

Naturally, heads began to turn.

Word got around. Something changed, something happened.

Furious was a kind word to describe Daredevil. Cute even. That was like a cat name for him. No, whatever happened to him invoked a grand jester of emotions. Someone close to him had to have been captured or killed. Or he was going through a harsh break up, which seemed highly unlikely.

(A few girls seemed to deny that, though. "Seriously, have you seen his ass in that suit?" They joked, mimicking a chef's kiss. "Even with all those anger issues, there was still a lot to give.")

Peter, Peter, Peter.

Every night for a solid week, everyone was scared to step outside. As soon as the sun set, that was the Devil's territory. And if you were spotted by him, you were in for a hell of a time. You either had to be incredibly brave or incredibly stupid to want to be found by him.

Because when he found you, there wasn't just Hell to pay.

No, there was something much, *much* worse.

Hell would seem like a paradise after he was done with you. No, Hell wasn't there to pay. *He was* .

*He works the muscles in his jaw. Stalking through the dark. Someone **will** pay.*

His fists were the coins and his snarl was the cash. And, well, whoever was caught, in all senses of the word, was broke.

Every night for a solid week, Daredevil was pouncing throughout the streets, on building tops. No area was left unturned by him.

The worst part?

He didn't just stop in Hell's Kitchen.

No, he *expanded*.

The darkness never felt so suffocating. Peter was gone, Peter was gone, Peter was--

Daredevil went through Midtown, Upstate, even went through Queens. He was everywhere, yet nowhere at the same time.

Nobody could catch the guy.

(Nobody wanted to.)

Word spread through New York.

Something was wrong.

Daredevil was *hurt*.

Nobody knew anything, and Matt had lost his scent. Peter was gone, and Matt had no leads.

Whatever, or whoever, it was, was held closely to his heart. And just like that, it was gone. And he was left feeling horrible. Left in the agonizing grip of pain, pain that he exuded with each step.

The Devil of Hell's Kitchen had something taken from him, and he was on a man hunt to find whoever it was who took it from him.

His loyal followers advocated for him. Went on about how he wouldn't just do this for nothing. Not without reason. He never acted this way before. Or, rather, to this degree.

Something.

Was.

Wrong.

A few people linked it to the disappearance of Tony Stark. Those few were laughed at. It had to have only been coincidence that those two events happened at the same time. Plus, it wasn't unlike the billionaire to suddenly drop off the face of the planet.

He didn't have any meetings set up for a while, according to the CEO.

He should have woken up sooner. Maybe he would've been able to catch the teen.

Yet Iron Man had been gone for a week, and so had Spiderman.

More people believed that something happened to the infamous webslinger, considering his recent co-ops with the Devil. Yet he was also more widely known for his famous take downs with Iron Man, so more people just assumed that those two were scampering off somewhere for a well deserved break.

Yet it had been a week since they left. And a week since Daredevil started his quiet rampage.

And there was no telling when he would stop. Every night was a waiting game. A nail biting, hair pulling game.

Dodge. A head tilt, sudden movement to the right. Cowardness exuding off of a body. Scared. They were scared, and they were scared of him.

Everyone in Hell's Kitchen was playing the sick game, despite not wanting to. People all over New York were playing, even if this was the first time they were hearing about The Scarlet Avenger. Everyone was playing the game, because the only way to win was for someone to fess up. Give details before he broke their teeth and snapped their jaws. Tell him what he wants to hear, or else.

Moms held their children tighter when the sun began to set.

Men rushed into buildings, a scream on their lips.

Dogs, cats, whatever animals lived in the city all seemed to quiet down.

And wait.

His knuckle cracked under the force of his punches, but that didn't deter him. No, it urged him on. Matt could still feel , and there was no telling if Peter could, too.

Wait for the screaming.

Wait for the news reports about more souls, begging for safety from the Devil.

Wait for the reprieve.

Wait for Daredevil to finally heal, and gain what was lost.

Nobody knew when it would end.

Nobody knew.

Because it had been a week since someone took someone close to Daredevil, and there was clearly no stopping him until he got them back.

Chapter End Notes

Somebody needs to hug Matt.

Sooooooooooooo this could possibly lead to a sequel.

No guarantees, especially since it's not really the true ending. And now I'll be working on a bunch of other fics featuring Daredad and Irondad (since there's a lack of the former). And, of course, one of the fics will be featuring a comeback of our favorite hero in the entire universe, Ms. Graves :-)

Thank you guys for joining me on this wild ride of a fic. You all are amazing and I absolutely love reading your reactions in the comments. They always make my day.

I hope to see you all here again soon for the next few stories.

Until next time! <3 <3 <3

End Notes

Join my discord!

<https://discord.gg/fXBC3aD>

Also, have a playlist that correlates with this story!

<https://open.spotify.com/user/22hs6fpem3qw452sj42xrgna/playlist/3LavvvabRrkJOvVhyPb7wl?si=t9edyarlQ7-pbu6rns4e7Q>

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!